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New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Address by Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rajapaksa (*spoke in Sinhala and in Tamil; English text provided by the delegation*) Sri Lanka congratulates the President on his election to this high office. We are confident that your guidance will enable the General Assembly to make progress on the important issues confronting humanity to make the work and role of the United Nations more relevant to the lives of billions of people.

While my mother tongue is Sinhala, let me elaborate a few thoughts in Tamil. Sinhala and Tamil are the two languages of the people of Sri Lanka. Both have been used through the centuries, are rich in literature and are widely used in my country, with recognition as official languages. With the widening of democracy in our country, the bonds between the Sinhala and Tamil people of Sri Lanka will grow stronger and remain a major force for its future development. We will march towards a richer freedom and the lasting unity that await us as a nation.

The theme of our debate — "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world as well as the need to democratize the United Nations" — is indeed far-sighted. It focuses on one of the critical survival needs of humanity, as well as one of the key institutional needs of the world body. The global food crisis has become a frightening actuality and has the potential to assume even more dangerous proportions if we fail to take urgent and collective action. Similarly, a less democratic United Nations runs the risk of being less effective and less credible, while giving rise to major concerns about its legitimacy.

Through a series of projects with regional impact, Sri Lanka will contribute to the goal of increasing food production, investing more in agriculture and research and sharing technologies and best practices. That is an integral part of the rural empowerment that is so essential in the developing world, as the vast majority of our people are rural based and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Achieving food security would require strengthening and revitalizing the agriculture sector. That calls for the empowerment of small- and medium-scale farmers through a series of measures. Those represent vital collective steps by all of us in the

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United Nations system. Sri Lanka sees self-sufficiency as the answer to overcoming the food crisis and giving strength to nations. No longer can we expect farmers in developing countries to be mainly producers for export markets.

In that context, implementation of effective social safety nets remains a priority as reassurance and empowerment. That is why we have introduced social security measures such as the fertilizer and fisheries subsidies. The advice given by some powerful countries and powerful institutions are contrary to that. Yet it is necessary that we pay no heed to such advice and determine to do what is best for the innocent people of our countries.

As the current Chair of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), I have the honour to state that at the recent summit we affirmed our resolve as a region to make our own contribution to grapple with the food crisis and to make our region revive its historic critical role in food production by once again becoming a major granary of the world. We also decided on the immediate establishment and operationalization of the SAARC Food Bank. That mechanism, we believe, will help considerably to ensure both food and nutritional security for the people of South Asia. That initiative will contribute to the larger global efforts that we launched in Rome, in June this year, to avert and mitigate the impact of the food crisis.

We must also find solutions to the energy crisis that are both equitable and pragmatic. Energy supplies must be diversified by developing advanced, cleaner, more efficient and cost-effective technologies for both fossil fuels and renewable energy sources. We need to engage in energy conservation and accept the reality of dependence on fossil fuels for much longer.

Equally obvious is the imperative of transferring new technology to the developing countries. In our own region, we will use increasing resources of human and scientific talent to produce our own technologies, making the best use of the natural resources, the sun, wind and the ocean, which we have in abundance, free of the restrictions of the marketplace. The demands of humanity can no longer be allowed to be at the mercy of speculative or captive markets.

To that end, Sri Lanka's own view is that the United Nations and its agencies must take leadership in developing a framework for international cooperation. We urge caution in the rush to use biofuels to break our dependence of fossil fuels. It has already been seen that the rush to biofuels has contributed to high food prices. Sri Lanka's policy is that no arable land should be diverted or directed to the production of biofuels, however profitable that may be in the short term. It was propitious that Sri Lanka acted with courage and foresight over the last three years, without being cowed by many pressures, and thus did not confront any situation where our people had to face hunger or starvation.

On climate change, SAARC leaders reiterated the need to redouble efforts within an expanded regional framework for environmental protection, conservation and justice. We stressed that we should contribute to restoring harmony with nature, a part of the heritage of South Asia. We humans have interfered with nature too much for too long. We must accept that the dangers of climate change are man-made and that its solutions, too, require man's intervention.

Since the promulgation of the Charter of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the tragedy of war, at least the major threat of intercontinental war seems to have receded. However, the just struggle of the Palestinians for statehood continues.

Today, the United Nations and its peoples are confronted with the fast-spreading menace of terrorism, which manifests itself in various forms in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The United Nations has a grave responsibility to save today's and succeeding generations from that new and continuing menace. We have been talking for long enough; it is time for clear action in that regard.

Like many other countries, Sri Lanka has not been spared this global menace. Exploiting perceived ethnic grievances that must and can be addressed through political means, a well-organized terror group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), engages in blatant and brutal acts of terrorism, including suicide bombings, to seek negotiating leverage, political recognition and legitimacy.

I am saddened by the loss of life and destruction caused by the recent terrorist attack in Pakistan.

Our Government has always been ready to address the causes of these issues and effectively implement political and constitutional solutions to

meet the aspirations and respect the rights of all communities. What the Government would not and could not do is to let an illegal and armed terrorist group, the LTTE, hold a fraction of our population, a part of the Tamil community, hostage to such terror in the northern part of Sri Lanka and deny those people their democratic rights to dissent and free elections. Through our past actions, we have proved it.

The Government has therefore declared its policy of engaging in dialogue and discussion with the democratic leadership of the Tamil community, a people who have lived in harmony with other Sri Lankans for centuries. Today, there are Tamil leaders holding responsible ministerial posts in my Government. A former Attorney-General of then Ceylon, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a beloved Tamil politician, had this to say at a public meeting in Colombo in September 1904: "I have been to many countries in the world. But nowhere have I seen such a friendly race as the Sinhalese, who also uphold high moral values." Such was the harmony between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. But a malicious group has turned all of this upside down.

All successive Governments of Sri Lanka have endeavoured to resolve the problem for over 25 years, including through Norwegian facilitation and international co-chairs overseeing a so-called peace process that was treated with contempt by the terrorists. On each occasion that talks were held seeking peace, the terrorists of the LTTE walked out on the flimsiest of pretexts and reverted to terrorism of the worst kind, indiscriminately targeting innocent civilians.

Our Government will only be ready to talk to that illegal armed group when it is ready to commit itself to decommissioning its illicit weapons, dismantling its military capability and returning to the democratic fold. The Government has also made it clear that the elected Government cannot and will not permit the undermining of the territorial integrity of the sovereign United Nations Member State of Sri Lanka and the division of its territory. We are clear in this message.

The Government's objective is to enable the people to enjoy the benefits of democratic processes and to speed development activities in those areas where there is a heavy presence of terrorists. That would be similar to the fast-tracking of economic development taking place in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, where former terrorists now serve as democratically elected Provincial Councillors, and a former child soldier conscripted by the LTTE is now the elected Chief Minister, having abandoned terrorism and embraced democracy.

Significantly, the restoration of democracy in the East of Sri Lanka was achieved in less than one year of it being freed from the clutches of terror.

Our Government has also sought and received the cooperation of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other agencies to help us in providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other affected civilians. The Secretary-General's Representative on IDPs, who visited Sri Lanka some years ago, said:

> "Sri Lanka presents the unusual situation of a central Government providing relief aid to persons under the control of the main opposition group. In a world replete with examples of Governments and rebel groups using food as a weapon against civilian populations, the situation in Sri Lanka is one that deserves closer attention if not more publicity as an important precedent." (*E/CN.4/1994/44/Add.1, para. 67*)

The Government of Sri Lanka continues this humanitarian policy even today, although we know that the terrorists seize a good proportion of those humanitarian supplies. Our supplies are not confined to food; they extend to medicines and all other essentials as well as schools and hospitals, with teachers, doctors, nurses, and all other essential staff. That is not all; the Government also purchases the paddy and other foodstuffs produced in those areas. I do not think there is any country in the world where there is a Government that provides such humanitarian assistance to terrorists that attack it. Our Government considers the supply of humanitarian relief to its people as its prime responsibility.

The complex situation in Sri Lanka needs to be addressed and resolved through an appropriate process of deterrent law-and-order action and patient political efforts of consensus-building. We have achieved the difficult but essential task of building peace in the Eastern Province and are confident that it can be done in the north as well.

This session of the Assembly is a good time to take stock of progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) around the globe. It is regrettable to note, as we do so, that most are behind schedule. The slowing down of global economic growth, financial turmoil and speculation, rising food and fuel prices and the impacts of climate change are clear obstacles. Also, sanctions imposed on the leaders of some countries, and on their leadership, based on their political role, following protests, are in fact, targeted at the innocent people of those countries.

The steadily growing menace of international terrorism, with related activities such as the smuggling of illegal arms, human trafficking, drug trafficking, money-laundering, and business empires run by terrorist groups undoubtedly undermine the fundamentals of humanity and civilization. It appears that steps taken by us to eradicate such illegal activities have not been effective. This further complicates all national and international efforts at moving towards realizing the MDGs. Terrorism, as I have emphasized many a time, by its very nature, pushes back even our modest achievements.

Another similar menace is threatening to devour our children, the most valuable asset of any nation. That is the insecurity of cyberspace which has not only helped corrupt the minds of our children but also exposes them to predators such as paedophiles, drug dealers and pornographic sites. Sri Lanka has banned pornographic and similar destructive sites from being available through Internet service providers. We are also controlling and restricting the use of mobile telephones for such damaging activities. That is an important area for world leaders to focus on.

It is important that urgent and collective actions, both short- and long-term, are taken to stem those adverse trends. Only such determined and concerted actions will enable progress to be made towards the realization of the agreed development goals, including the MDGs, and frustrate elements that are bent on reversing the gains made.

We must deeply commit ourselves as Members of the United Nations to forging a way forward from the limitations not seen by those who laid the foundations for this great institution of humankind. If we fail to do it now, future generations will curse us.

I wish to conclude my address with a verse from the Dhammapada, words from the Enlightened One:

"Victory breeds hatred,

The defeated live in pain.

Happily the calmed live,

Having set victory and defeat aside."

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Victor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Ukraine.

Mr. Victor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Victor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Yushchenko (*spoke in Ukrainian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is a great honour for me to address the world community: the United Nations and its biggest representative body, the General Assembly.

Together with all other Member States, I am grateful to the Macedonian representative Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his effective work as President of the Assembly at its last session.

I congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him every success at this critical time.

I am confident that we all have the same feeling. Empty words and general discussions have had their day. We feel a cool wind in international relations that complicates and tempers mutual responsibilities. The difference in temperature and pressure leads to a hurricane. Atmospheric changes in worldwide politics have comparable effects.

The great illusion of power becomes today's ultimate weakness and the giant vehicle of ideals and shaping forces. The principal challenge before us lies in the neglect and undermining of the standards of international law and foreign affairs.

We see a trend towards the demolition of the global system, whose cornerstone is the unflagging international will and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and established boundaries of States.

Ukraine has the right to speak these words. We were among the founders of the United Nations and one of the co-authors of its Charter.

We are a nation that underwent fatal trials and regained a commonwealth in a legitimate and recognized way. The representatives of dozens of States that share such a fate with us are here in this room.

The latest events in the Caucasus are of the utmost concern to us. I express condolences for the tragedy suffered by each human being and each family regardless of race or allegiance — Georgians, Ossetians and Russians. Suffering does not discriminate among peoples. Each person has dignity and the ability to recognize truth, hypocrisy, deliberate aggression, manipulation of public opinion and candid support for separatism.

Ukraine condemns all acts of aggression and use of force that occurred in the region. Ukraine vigorously denounces violation of the territorial integrity and inviolability of the Georgian frontiers and the armed annexation of its territory.

Ukraine does not recognize the independence of the self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ukraine does not acknowledge, and condemns, the attempt at illegitimate and separatist affirmation of the statehood of any territories. This position is fundamental for Ukrainian foreign policy.

Deviation from the United Nations principles, such as the use of force, and the renewal of cold-war rhetoric provoke our deep concern. Those processes create a potential threat both for Ukraine and for other countries in the region.

The problem cannot be solved through isolation, self-isolation or mutual accusations. There is only one way out. With common and good will we are to consolidate our values and the aims contained in the United Nations Charter and the Millennium Declaration.

With full responsibility for peace and security, we need to stop disturbances by separatist spirits, which can turn into misfortune for the instigators themselves. It is essential to reject blackmailing and threatening vocabulary. Ukraine rejects pressure of any kind regarding ways to ensure its own security and to determine membership in collective security structures. Such attempts at infringement are short-sighted and counterproductive.

We call for the strengthening of the role of the Security Council, the only body with exclusive authority in issues of global peace and security. We need its decisions to be balanced and its actions to be effective.

Ukraine supports all efforts aimed at peaceful settlement and unblocking of the situation on the South Caucasus and will fully cooperate in that process. We will continue our peacekeeping activities firmly and vigorously, and we will participate in the settlement of the protracted conflicts on the basis of respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, human rights, freedoms and dignity.

The world is waiting for a confident and positive response from the United Nations. The world needs renewed confidence in our collective efforts and strict adherence to the norms of international law and to the United Nations Organization.

Our national agenda is concordant with the main challenges facing the international community. As a country possessing the best black-earth soil in the world, Ukraine is going to contribute tangibly to the common work on solving the global food crisis.

We plan to consolidate all possible efforts to realize an effective and just energy policy. The principles that should be implemented are mutual benefit, the continuous fulfilment of obligations and the inadmissibility of any energy pressure.

We reinforce our call for more active global cooperation in the sphere of the environment. Ukraine puts forward an initiative to develop a binding framework agreement — a World Environmental Constitution — and to establish a single-structure system for ecological and environmental protection.

with relevant authority and mechanisms in the United Nations.

We plan to revitalize efforts in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other dangerous diseases. This problem remains highly topical for Ukraine.

Undoubtedly, Ukraine will continue to keep an eye on the whole range of common tasks and challenges, from poverty problems to trafficking in human beings, international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The line we follow is clear. Our policy is based on democratic values, open dialogue with all partners of different cultures, and unconditional respect for fundamental human rights. I have the honour to appeal to the world community with a request for solidarity.

This year Ukraine will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Great Famine — the Holodomor, which took the lives of about 10 million of our compatriots. Our intention is not directed against any people or State. We neither overstate nor understate our sorrow. The tenor of hunger in Ukraine was oriented towards genocide and was accompanied by the total elimination of the national elite, the public leadership and the priesthood. The goal was to overpower a nation of millions, because according to the regime, there were too many people to displace to Siberia.

It is important that our steps encourage other countries of the former Soviet Union to find the truth. We share the pain of all the people affected — Russians, Belarusians, Kazakhs and dozens of other nations. We invite a joint commemoration of each national tragedy and no toleration of new attempts to create a heroic aureole around Stalin and his regime. We have invaluable examples of mutual understanding with Poland, Hungary and other States. Honest and sincere memories about the past have not split us but have united us. It is our aspiration that memories of the victims of the Holodomor and other crimes of totalitarian regimes will prevent the world from repeating such catastrophes.

I believe in our ability to respond effectively to every challenge the world is facing. Ukraine is determined to work on this. We will act as dedicated partners. Everything is in our hands. I believe in our power, will and wisdom.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Ukraine for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Victor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The President took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Fernando Lugo Méndez, President of the Republic of Paraguay

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Fernando Lugo Méndez, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Fernando Lugo Méndez, President of the Republic of Paraguay, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Lugo Méndez (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the nation of Paraguay, I wish to express to you, Mr. President, my most sincere congratulations on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish you every success.

This is a place where every year the Powers of the world write history that should transcend mere lofty political prose and be a tool for verse — the poetry of eliminating hunger, embracing equity among nations and building a better world for all. I believe that, one day, these enormous buildings — which were built with the aim of preventing war — will be increasingly dedicated to providing bread, eradicating hunger and malnutrition throughout the world and saving millions of lives from disease and violence of all kinds.

After 61 years of single-party Government and for the first time in my country's political history, a party has come to power via the ballot — the appropriate means under the democratic code. Paraguay is soaring on the winds of democratic change that are blowing through the region. The new Government that I represent is an unequivocal response to the many needs that have arisen and opportunities that have been lost in recent decades. This year, citizens voted for greater social justice, to halt the

massive destruction of the environment, and to combat the corruption, shady dealings and favouritism of a weakened and opportunistic State that delayed the implementation of a sustainable and inclusive development strategy for years.

The new administration represents the end of our 19-year transition to democracy and has embarked on reform of the State and the economy. It has encouraged citizens to participate in the political decision-making process. We understand that political and economic stability is not more important than social stability. That is why we are committed to applying social policies to combat extreme poverty. We cannot hope for sustainable development when the market and the State deny opportunities to the weakest, nor is it possible to sustain democracy when the vast majority are excluded from enjoying economic benefits. We therefore believe in economic growth with social equity and in environmental responsibility as the very heart of our public policies.

Paraguay has opened a door of opportunity to the world. Two weeks ago, before we had come to the end of our first month in power, my Government launched a major assault on illicit Government management. The mafias that enjoyed shameful and excessive wealth through their influence on public power are enduring the worst moment of their history in Paraguay. We do not rule out the possibility of stripping the ill-gotten gains from those whom scandalous wealth made millionaires overnight and are now digging in their heels and even hatching specific plots to foment political and economic instability. The political holdovers in Paraguay still cling to a fascistic style of patronage, to which my Government has responded firmly but calmly. We will show zero tolerance for any anti-democratic activity and close our doors to all blackmail and any attempt to revive outdated models of access to power.

The new Government, which came to power on 15 August, has been proactive in a historic show of solidarity with the democratic peoples of Latin America and in its rapid response in defence of democratically elected Governments, such as in the sister Republic of Bolivia, in the context of the Union of South American Nations. We also thank those brotherly countries that stood with us in the face of potential instability and have expressed their concern for and solidarity with the Paraguayan process.

The only way to build economic relations has been through a market mechanism which sold Latin America on the financial speculation of the 1980s that sunk our continent in debt, sidelined the role of the State and widened the gap between rich and poor. That mechanism, which was forced upon us, has proven to be wrong-headed and very costly for our peoples on the social level.

Today, we are seeing a financial crisis in developed economies as a result of immoral speculation that also affects the well-being of peoples. The sole motive behind such speculation is the desire for greater wealth that privatizes benefits and socializes the costs of unregulated market economies.

Paraguay is in favour of strengthening the General Assembly and restoring its mandated attributes and functions under the United Nations Charter. As the most representative body of the Organization, the Assembly must become a true world parliament in which the major issues affecting humankind can be discussed and are not relegated to other bodies whose decision-making process is confined to a small number of countries that often fail to take the opinion of the majority of the membership into account.

Paraguay believes that the problems that have led to climate change call for short- and long-term world responses in line with the most recent scientific advances and applied in a fashion that is compatible with the economic and social development of each country affected. Countries with economies in development suffer in particular from vulnerability and isolation as they attempt to enter the globalized market.

Ironically, it is the poorest — those who are the least responsible for climate change — who suffer most from its consequences. When it comes to major responsibility, we often note the irony of conservation measures imposed on areas of the world that are already suffering from poverty and exclusion. At the same time, we note the sustained indifference and limited capacities for self-criticism in the political realms that manage the fate of the world. That is precisely where the principal industrial and consumption phenomena arise, creating societies that, due to the irresponsibility of their leaders, persist in depleting their own resources, their own lands, their own dreams and their own lives.

Paraguay therefore calls on countries to recognize their shared but differentiated responsibilities. We

stress the need for all members of the international community to act on their pledges. The same is true in determining political and economic responsibility for the deterioration of the world — the irreplaceable home of humankind.

At the same high level as our concern for the structural and immediate causes of poverty is our concern for the situation of indigenous peoples. Not only are they poor and excluded, but in many regions of the continent they have not reached a level of civic inclusion that permits them to be involved in decision-making processes. In many cases, those who uphold a discourse of inclusion are intolerant when our indigenous brothers take on political leadership roles.

The indigenous nations of Latin America are not the ancient creation of our continent, but the most vital potential for political action, which we must respect, promote and include. If we did not, that would be an intolerable attack against our own civilization. America must wake up in the face of all of that.

We need to account for the old debt, which began to accrue in the filthy bowels of the slave ships and continued to grow with every gesture of disdain towards any indigenous attempt to have their say, their vote, their dreams and their plans for the land that at one time was theirs alone. Recognizing indigenous peoples as participants in the political and participatory processes of the State is still a pending issue, and it is a sad expression of intolerance in many regions.

In Paraguay, we have begun a process of transparency that has no precedents. The media are playing a fundamental role in this process. They were very proactive in combating corruption in Paraguay, and today, because of their questioning of our management, they are working at a high standard to generate ongoing self-criticism. As we guarantee the most unconditional support for enlightened management in journalism, self-expression and the right to access information, we seek to open up better horizons for the communications and education media, which had always been persecuted or dismissed as of no importance in our country.

We must work to build a more just world through social engineering. It is time to go beyond statements that are incapable of showing clear signs of progress in the fight against poverty and exclusion. The world's forums for debate and reflection cause strain and risk losing credibility if they do not lead to actions that can draw a smile on the faces of unemployed youths who have no future. It is sad to see migrants who wander in an incessant exodus of biblical proportions, or to see women who are relegated to a secondary position by a culture and a civilization unable to recover the original dignity that belongs to them, who give life, affection, creativity and courage to change the world.

We need to highlight food security by ensuring not only space and opportunities for self-managed production, but also its cultural, sovereign and national identity dimensions. We are calling for greater, better and more timely international assistance for agricultural and fishing production in order to ensure increasing food production without destroying the environment and avoiding the current rise in food prices. Those costs end up punishing primarily the most vulnerable groups. On the global scale, we call upon nations that are heading huge agricultural projects to recognize the tribulations of small local producers, who often are crushed by new models that are arrogantly imposed on them.

The question of landlocked developing countries is a fundamental issue in Paraguay's foreign policy. The disadvantages and asymmetries that that geographic situation has generated and continues to generate can be remedied only through international recognition and the granting of special, differentiated treatment in the country's insertion into a globalized world.

Paraguay believes that the upcoming midterm review meeting of the Almaty Programme of Action is extremely important. It is an opportunity to consolidate achievements made so far and to ensure greater commitment from international bodies and from more developed countries. Working together in a coordinated matter will help landlocked developing countries overcome their limitations.

In Paraguay, large corporations — the Itaipu with Brazil and the Yasyreta with Argentina — offer abundant and available electric energy. Our Government is committed to prioritizing and using these renewable resources for economic and social development of the country in such a manner as to complement our efforts to create better sources of work, more production and a reduction of poverty. We are operating in a framework of increasingly fluid dialogue with our brotherly countries, with which we share those power stations, so that the benefits can

repair the social debts deserving our attention and become true factors for economic growth.

Taking into account the upcoming review of the financing for development process, which will take place in Doha at the end of the year, Paraguay calls for the international community to mobilize its external resources to provide decisive support for the development of small economies. That is a priority both for both international financial bodies and developed economies. We would like the call for just international trade to become a true impetus for development.

Many of our countries have communities in various places in the world. Just like Europeans who in the past century came to America, today many friends and families from our regions seek better prospects in the countries of Europe and in North America. We call upon the humanitarian, brotherly, hospitable sense — the same that our continent showed in the past in sharing its scarce resources — in nations that today take in our migrants, who are dreaming of having a job and the right to a dignified life, far from their countries. The human dimension of that drama calls for a frank dialogue with receiving countries to find a solution to this new drama of globalization.

The Republic of Paraguay believes that, although progress has been made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we cannot deny the existence of the inequalities that persist in the developed world. Millions of people continue to live in extreme poverty, a situation that is worsened by the sudden increase in the cost of food and fuel and the consequences of climate change.

In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015, we are calling for strengthening the combined efforts of Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector in the context of a global alliance for stronger and more effective development, increasing official development assistance for the most vulnerable economies in particular.

We must not forget the thousands of millions of human beings worldwide who live below the poverty line. In our Latin American subcontinent, poverty has risen to 44 per cent of the population. In Paraguay, 35.6 per cent of our citizens suffer from this scourge, and of those almost 20 per cent live below the line of extreme poverty. Malnutrition now affects four out of every 100 Paraguayan children. This situation is unacceptable and demands a radical change in the approach taken to combat this state of affairs. The most disadvantaged, those who remain in the sidelines of development are the ones we must listen to, and alleviating their suffering must be our priority.

Today more than ever, Paraguay requires international cooperation in achieving its socio-economic priorities, in developing and strengthening its institutions and in providing preferential attention to the most vulnerable sectors. We hope that the opening of developing countries will favour the most disadvantaged and that the same restrictions demanded in the development of more developed economies will not be applied.

We believe that this will be a vital tool for strengthening developing countries. That is why Paraguay signed the constitution of the Bank of the South and will continue to support the strengthening of that institution so that it can meet its objectives of financing the balanced and stable economic and social development of its member States, promoting macroeconomic stability and strengthening integration in order to set the foundation for regional and financial autonomy. However, that does not mean that we no longer require the support, resources and cooperation of the most developed countries for the two modes of cooperation are complementary for development.

Paraguay believes that the international community should ensure that the mobilization of external resources becomes a priority for international financial bodies and the developed economies. To that end, we must regain the level of expansion of official development assistance, which in recent years has been shrinking in a disturbing fashion.

Terrorism must be eradicated from the face of the Earth. There is nothing more dangerous to the unity of civilization than terrorism as a fact of daily life: the terrorism that kills children through hunger; the terrorism of weapons anywhere; the terrorism that affects children in my country who die because of toxic produce; the terrorism that killed our brothers in the Twin Towers, which will continue to kill as long as war remains a business for a few and fanaticism continues to cloud our hearts.

I know that love is a word not frequently used in political discourse, but there is no other way to rebuild a world so disfigured by hate. We must not forget individuals who, for various physical and mental

reasons, have special capacities. Those are our dearest brothers and sisters in a world that often excludes those who cannot compete in terms of physical strength or thought. We must create conditions to enable them to share in our everyday lives without suffering the burden of exclusion or indifference. Our efforts to support that sector of the population need not be extraordinary but should be carried out in daily actions, rich in sharing and informed by an awareness of brotherhood and nature.

In this globalized world where things happen so quickly and communication is immediate, we see clearly its greatest technological advancements, its powerful financial architecture and its scientific plans to colonize the universe, but, we have to ask ourselves, where has the human being been left in all of this?

Men and women must always remain at the centre of that scenario. The only thing that will save us from post-modern savagery is if they recover their place from which no one should ever have been exiled. Humanity is the only value shared, without a single difference, by a child dying of hunger in a developing country and a child who eats breakfast every day in a developed country.

Paraguay is a small country in the world, but it believes in friendship. That is why we have set 30 July as the Day of Friendship. We hope that this initiative will resonate in various regions of the world and that friendship, with its values and its principles, sooner rather than later will replace the hostility which is so present in our times.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Fernando Lugo Méndez, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Aníbal António Cavaco Silva, President of the Portuguese Republic

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Portuguese Republic.

Mr. Aníbal António Cavaco Silva, President of the Portuguese Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Aníbal António Cavaco Silva, President of the Portuguese Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Cavaco Silva: (*spoke in Portuguese; interpretation provided by the delegation*): Mr. President, I wish you all success for your tenure in office.

Guaranteeing international peace and security as well as the sustainable development of our peoples is our shared responsibility. The way we carry it out will determine our common destiny. The centrality of the United Nations has never been so clear. The United Nations will be what we, as sovereign and equal Member States, want it to be.

We live in a time of historic acceleration, a time of great opportunities but also of challenges on a global scale. Global challenges imply a collective responsibility. The United Nations is the forum that best embodies that collective responsibility. That is also why I strongly support the statement made by the President of the French Republic, current President of the Council of the European Union.

In a globalized and interdependent world, only strong multilateral institutions can promote the fundamental values of peace, democracy, human rights and sustainable development. Portugal is committed to supporting effective multilateralism based on a cohesive and efficient United Nations.

Our words cannot be empty rhetoric. Therefore we must be consistent and put into practice the values and principles we defend. Our actions must be based on very clear assumptions. First, we must make every effort to ensure that the United Nations has the means necessary to fulfil its mission, and we must contribute to the achievement of the mandates with which we entrust it.

Secondly, we must ensure broader representation in the United Nations bodies and make their actions more transparent. Is it reasonable to continue having a Security Council without reforming its working methods, when countries such as Brazil and India have no permanent seat and when Africa is not permanently represented? We surely do not think so and are open to the possibility of broader solutions.

Thirdly, we must guarantee the fulfilment of the declarations on human rights approved by all of us. The Organization must bear in mind that the ultimate beneficiaries of its actions are not States as such, but the citizens and peoples that compose them.

Portugal has been committed to this common effort — first, by participating in peacekeeping operations. I would like to commend the many thousands of Portuguese who have participated in over 20 missions led by the United Nations and those who currently are taking part in missions in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Kosovo, Lebanon and Timor-Leste.

This year we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations, and I would like to pay tribute to all of the Blue Helmets. In particular I pay tribute to the memory of all of those, including Portuguese nationals, who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the ideals of the United Nations Charter.

Africa must remain a priority. That belief led us, together with our African partners, to hold the Cairo and Lisbon summits between the European Union (EU) and Africa, which began to further the dialogue between the two continents. The shared principles, the commitments undertaken and the EU-Africa Joint Strategy illustrate a renewed partnership based on cooperation in areas such as peace and security, development, good governance and human rights, trade and regional integration. Peace, sustainable development, access to education and health care and the integration of African economies in the international markets are essential objectives in building a more just, peaceful and balanced international order. Accordingly, we must support the efforts of the African nations to achieve those objectives.

In that context, I would like to congratulate the Angolan people for the civic-minded manner in which they conducted their recent electoral process. The legislative elections had a profound bearing on the consolidation of democracy in Angola, with important regional political repercussions.

I also welcome the political agreement in Zimbabwe, which we hope will mark a new period of national reconciliation as well as political and economic development.

I wish also to congratulate Guinea-Bissau on the anniversary of its independence. Guinea-Bissau is one of the States Members of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), from which it has received strong political support. The CPLP has undertaken increasing responsibilities as an operational partner of the regional organizations to which its member States belong, such as the European Union and the African Union, and of global organizations such as the United Nations.

The recent Lisbon summit of the CPLP, at which Portugal took over the presidency of the Community, confirmed its members' determination to promote peace, democracy, human rights and development. It also led to the definition of a common strategy of international assertiveness based on our shared asset: the Portuguese language — the fifth most spoken language in the world, connecting nations and peoples in five continents. This assertiveness should lead to the increased use of Portuguese as an official or working language of international organizations.

Recently, Portugal also assumed the presidency of the Community of Democracies. Very soon, we will be presiding over the Ibero-American Summit — a genuine reference point for political cooperation based on shared cultures and values. We are honoured by those mandates, which we intend to exercise with determination and confidence.

Portugal believes that the natural vocation of the Alliance of Civilizations to bring together peoples, cultures and religions will be instrumental in establishing a world where dialogue prevails over conflict and where tolerance, respect for cultural diversity and individual identity, and mutual understanding overcome built-up tensions. We therefore resolutely support the Implementation Plan of the High Representative of the Secretary-General.

Seven years have passed since New York suffered one of the most infamous acts the world has witnessed in our time. Although much has been done since then, terrorism continues to be a threat. The implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is fundamental to success in combating that common enemy. In that regard, it is crucial to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, the promotion of which contributes to preventing terrorism.

Hunger and extreme poverty are other, more insidious but equally destructive common enemies.

Much has also been said in that connection, and some measures have been taken. However, much more is required. We reiterate our unwavering support for the Millennium Development Goals. Portugal, which is contributing to the limit of its capabilities, is directing most of its development aid to Africa, where the levels of poverty are most striking.

We are pleased to note the establishment of the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis. Combating hunger and poverty requires a strengthened global partnership in which the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions have a central role to play.

Ensuring sustainable development requires that we confront the challenges posed by climate change together. Failure to act now will result in an irreversible legacy for future generations, as shown by the last progress report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In that common effort, we must support those who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as small island developing States and least developed countries.

Oceans, seas, islands and coastal areas, which are vital for human life and economic prosperity, deserve our utmost attention. It is therefore important that we join efforts to ensure that negotiations are completed by December next year on a global and transparent agreement on a post-2012 climate regime.

Economic development is not an end in itself; it is a means towards the progress of humankind and the affirmation of human rights. Portugal has been the driving force behind the draft optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which the Assembly will be called upon to adopt. It is our opinion that the draft protocol represents a landmark in the promotion of democracy that will enable us to properly celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Let us always bear in mind that the dignity of human beings is not negotiable.

I would now like to refer to the humanitarian situation of refugees. Portugal acknowledges the remarkable work carried out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We must continue our collective efforts. In that regard, my country has responded to the need by tripling its refugee quota.

We are the United Nations. Its destiny is in our hands. The success of the Organization is closely linked to its capacity for regeneration and increased democratization, representation and effectiveness. I therefore wish to commend the consensus in the General Assembly as regards the Security Council reform process, which should enable intergovernmental negotiations to begin shortly. Portugal is honoured to be directly associated with that outcome.

In 2000, Portugal submitted its candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for the biennium 2011-2012. Our candidacy must be considered in the light of the principles and values of the United Nations that we have long defended and which are enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution. We stand for service to peace and stability, sustainable development and human rights. We also believe in the central role of the Organization in pursuing those goals. We stand for equal representation for those States that constitute the majority in this house because we believe that that is the best way to guarantee a sense of justice, which is essential if decisions are to be accepted by all.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Portuguese Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Aníbal António Cavaco Silva, President of the Portuguese Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kufuor: Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your very inspiring statement yesterday (see A/63/PV.5). Its

vision and compassion should provide a framework for the deliberations of the General Assembly into the future.

I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his unequivocal resolve to use his tenure to provide accountable leadership to this global institution. His call for increased support from all Members in restructuring and streamlining the Secretariat he leads to ensure more flexible, efficient and effective tackling of the many global challenges confronting humankind is timely and must be heeded.

The unmistakable fact of our time is that the world is in a state of flux with unmatched challenges aptly described yesterday by you, Mr. President, as a confluence of large-scale interrelated crises. That is befuddling all nations, strong and weak, rich and poor; but, as you and others have also observed, there are tremendous opportunities as well. Examples of the challenges that practically all previous speakers have alluded to include the phenomenon of climate change and its attendant snow-melts, tsunamis, floods and droughts; the difficult-to-explain turbulence in the crude oil market; the soaring prices of food; the upheavals in the world financial market; the massive trafficking in drugs and weapons; and the spate of harrowing acts of terrorism in many parts of the world. While some of those problems are natural, many of them are man-made.

On the other hand, the advent of information and communication technologies is effecting magical changes in awareness and making time, space and boundaries virtually irrelevant to human interactivity around the world. Discoveries in medicine are improving the quality of life and life expectancy. Fast transportation, dramatic feats in engineering and bioscience technologies with the promise of turning even deserts into productive land are unleashing unimaginable wealth among nations and individuals. Collectively, those opportunities are diffusing power around the world, to such an extent as to negate any idea of a few nations having hegemonic sway in human affairs.

Indeed, the era of the explosion of knowledge can be said to be fulfilling the biblical saying that humankind has been created in the image of God. Humankind is increasingly showing limitless creativity, which inspires a vision that it is indeed capable of overcoming the challenges of our time. However, the problem is one of whether we will curb our self-centredness, greed, bigotry and petty inhumanities to allow for the sharing of the outcomes of that creativity. Left to our individual nations, the peoples of the world will not be high-minded enough. The main challenge then becomes how the various peoples of the world will accept their common humanity as the centrepiece of their endeavours.

There must be leadership, for which the Organization seems to have been created. The founding fathers must have instinctively believed that, with time, the Organization would evolve into a global Government. For even as there were marked geopolitical considerations in the establishment of the United Nations, the Organization was also imbued with a powerful streak of morality. With time, the moral streak has been steadily overcoming the geopolitical dimension. That perception is what must drive the entire membership to accept the call for reform of this global institution and its agencies so as to make them accountable to Members and, in turn, make Members accept their authority and direction.

Indeed, the United Nations is the only Organization in the world with the potential to command respect across the board. Under its auspices, strong and rich nations alike are showing increasing tendencies to share knowledge and finance resources with the weak and poor. Fellow-feeling in international relations is also deepening. It is my belief that it is through the Organization that the world will eventually achieve peace, stability and prosperity, following the menacing flux that engulfs all of us now.

It is the same moral streak embedded in the United Nations that is propelling the development of the various regional blocs around the world. In the case of Africa, dramatic improvements have been made in the last decade and a half. The African Union's Peer Review Mechanism demonstrates the great resolve of African nations to adhere to the rule of law and good governance. It is noteworthy that, as of now, close to a majority of the membership of the Union has signed up for review. It is also significant that many more African leaders are today acceding to power through the ballot box.

Meanwhile, under the auspices of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, Africa is trying to pool resources among its members, in partnership with others outside the continent, to exploit its huge

potential and to develop its markets and its energy, telecommunication, transportation and agriculture sectors, among others. That is the way to solve the many problems of poverty, illiteracy, disease, ignorance and conflict. It is Africa's initiative to mainstream itself into globalization, and is receiving the support of the international community. Evidence of that includes the many joint conferences held with Japan, China, Brazil and India, as well as Africa's old allies in Europe and North America.

While we appreciate the support from our development partners, I must say that there is still room for improvement, especially as regards the continent's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The various existing forms of assistance are uncoordinated and insufficiently substantial to achieve the Goals by the target date of 2015. In that regard, the Secretary-General's call for review and quick delivery of support is timely. As observed in the Accra Accord of the twelfth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the whole idea of aid is to empower beneficiary countries to stand on their own feet and to become effective partners in the global market, from which neither rich nor poor countries can abstain, given the increasing interdependence of the world.

In January 2001, I was sworn into office as President of Ghana on a liberal democratic Constitution with the same strong streak of morality that I see in the Charter of the United Nations. The Constitution acknowledges the centrality of humankind in all endeavours; hence the provisions for respect for human rights, the rule of law, gender balance, accountability and transparency in governance.

But, in 2001 the national economy was in bad shape and Ghana had to sign up for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative (HIPC) in order to access funds for various reconstruction projects for which credit lines were difficult to come by. With national determination and great discipline, the HIPC completion point was achieved in record time to earn debt forgiveness of about $8 billion from bilateral and multilateral creditors. That success has led to increased inflows of domestic and foreign investment that have enabled the Government to launch, among other social services, a free and compulsory universal basic education programme and substantial developments in both the second-cycle and tertiary levels education.

In the health sector, the first-ever national health insurance scheme, including free maternal care, has also begun in Ghana. Concurrently, heavy investments are being made in infrastructure in the transportation, energy and telecommunications sectors in anticipation of accelerated growth in the economy. Meanwhile, a process to modernize the country's agriculture through mechanization has begun to improve the welfare of the more than 60 per cent of society that is rural and depends on the sector for its livelihood.

By those policies, among others, the nation is now in sight of attaining its ambitious vision of middle income status by 2015, which is also the target date for the Millennium Development Goals. Those developments have been crowned by the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, which the Government is determined to make a blessing for the whole nation of Ghana, rather than a curse.

That is the Ghana story as my term of office comes to a close at the end of this year. The moral I glean from the story is that development in freedom is possible. In other words, accelerated national development and good governance, including respect for fundamental human rights, are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, good governance should hasten development.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Ghana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Chile.

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Bachelet Jeria (*spoke in Spanish*): Eight years ago, representatives of all the countries of the planet met in the General Assembly Hall to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2) — a text that is one of the broadest and most explicit agreements ever drafted by the international community on the subject of development, well-being and quality of life. The Declaration set a series of very precise standards in the fight against hunger and poverty, education, health, gender equality, environment and cooperation, stating for each the minimum to which nations should commit themselves.

The world at that time announced the civilizing mission to which it aspired and identified the inescapable challenges and unavoidable tasks for any Government and for the international community. It defined a real ethical vision for the leaders of the nations. The world has changed since then, however.

We have witnessed, sometimes tragically, the emergence or reappearance of various problems of global significance, such as climate change, terrorism or the food crisis. At the same time, the interdependence of economies and communications has become even greater over the past eight years, which has undoubtedly created many opportunities but also greater risks and inequities.

In that changing context, we have witnessed outstanding progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in many countries of the world, but we have also witnessed many regrettable setbacks. World events over the past year give us much food for thought that will allow us to act decisively. The optimism of the turn of the century, leading to talk of the "millennium of hope", seems to be dissipating. It is estimated that the increase in food prices alone has driven more than 100 million people into extreme poverty. In turn, financial instability today is afflicting many economies, threatening to generate a worldwide trend towards recession in which — as always — those most affected in the end will be the world's poorest.

That is why it is so crucial to review our Goals. We cannot remain indifferent to the deterioration of the basic well-being of millions and millions of citizens all over the world. Those of us who share the same concept of progress and have made freedom and social justice our watchwords must raise our voices.

The world has managed to secure the economic, technical and scientific resources that, for the first time in its history, can ensure the well-being of all mankind. We cannot squander that capacity. A better world is possible, but it requires determination to move forward, and the current international economic crisis shows that it is precisely such determination that has been lacking.

The greed and irresponsibility of a few, combined with the political negligence of others, has plunged the world into a situation of great uncertainty. What a paradox we are witnessing today! With the money used to bail out the international banking system, the scourge of hunger on the planet could easily have been eliminated. Thus, now is the time to reaffirm our resolve.

The international economic crisis is a blow to those who believe that nothing can be done, that nothing should be regulated or that inequality cannot be remedied. That is the major lesson to be learned from what has happened over the past year. None of the current problems facing mankind, and certainly none of the civilizing goals that we have set ourselves, can be tackled properly if the public does not have a clear option of collective action by States and civil society.

That is why today I appeal to all to work together to support emergency measures to address the food crisis and to redouble our efforts to ensure that the developing economic crisis does not prevent us from attaining the Millennium Development Goals. That is why I appeal for an urgent and genuine commitment to multilateralism. That is why we must undertake to continue supporting and reforming international institutions, particularly the United Nations, to make them more representative, more democratic and more responsive to the hopes of our peoples.

That is also why we must reach agreement at the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization. That is why we must achieve concrete results at the forthcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development. That is why we must also ensure the success of the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference and convert those negotiations into agreements that make a decisive contribution to development.

I appear before this General Assembly as the representative of a nation that has much to contribute.

Modestly and proudly, we announce to this Assembly that Chile is ahead of schedule towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals set for 2015. I emphasize that it is possible to eradicate poverty, that it is possible to emerge from underdevelopment and, even more importantly, that it is possible to do so in democracy and freedom.

My country almost tripled the size of its economy between 1990 and 2008, which are the years of democracy in Chile. Just as we have made the economy grow, we have also made social investment and equity grow. We have advanced strongly on all fronts: health, education, housing, quality of life, social cohesion and greater gender opportunities.

The numbers speak for themselves. At the end of the dictatorship, in 1989, 4 out of every 10 Chileans were living in poverty. That 40 per cent dropped to 13 per cent in 2006. Although there is much to do, whenever we achieve one goal we set ourselves a new horizon of challenges. Just as we have drastically reduced poverty, today we aim to guarantee universal access for all Chileans to a social welfare system that allows them to live their lives in tranquillity and removes the fear of disease, poverty or old age, thus increasing opportunities for all, so as to advance steadily in greater equality and dignity.

However, this morning I wish to highlight the reasons for those achievements. What underlies them is a clear political determination, shared by the majority. The country has freely chosen a path of economic growth, political democracy and social justice. All political sectors have converged on that path, with differences, of course, as in any democracy, but all are aware that those are the major goals of Chilean society, because behind the achievements there is also a sad learning process.

In the past, when the country became divided, when the country became polarized in two irreconcilable factions, there was much suffering and very great social setbacks. Democracy placed at the centre of public life, as a goal for a freer and more just society, has been one of the main lessons that we Chileans have learned and that largely explains the achievements of the last 18 years.

That same conviction led us recently to be very active in coming to the aid of a friendly democracy. One week ago, when there was a threat to disrupt the democratic institutional order in the Republic of Bolivia, we nations of South America came to the support of the legitimately elected authorities and offered our cooperation to help in the resumption of the domestic political dialogue, while condemning the rebellion and bloodshed. Within a few days, we succeeded in convening a meeting of the Presidents of the member countries of the Union of South American Nations in Santiago de Chile, in order to agree with the President of Bolivia on a process for talks and to find and support a peaceful solution to the conflict in that country.

From this rostrum, as the convener of that historic regional meeting, I wish to express appreciation for the willingness displayed by all those involved, because we thereby set an example of how multilateral commitment should be understood. It is a commitment forged in the diversity of political projects but based on shared values, such as democracy, peace and the defence of human rights. The La Moneda summit — as that meeting was called, after the Chilean presidential palace — will forever symbolize the moment at which the South American nations decided to strengthen their commitment to democracy, whenever it is threatened anywhere on the continent.

Yet what does that episode tell us? It tells us that the values of democracy, dialogue, human rights and peace are becoming stronger than ever in Latin America. It tells us that the region wants to leave behind the dark moments of its history. It tells us that democracy is established as a system of government. It tells us that violence has no place in politics. And it tells us that those values, in addition to being widely shared by the citizens, are becoming entrenched in multilateralism, in institutions and in international law.

Over these years, we have learned that national policies, although essential, are not enough, that there is no incompatibility between affirmation of one's own identity and integration, and that international agreements must be formulated to govern globalization and make democracy and the social rights of the citizens a universal requirement. Each country has the right and the duty to contribute to the creation of a world in which the great values of mankind prevail, regardless of the country's economic or demographic dimension, of its influence or its power, or of how close it is to or how far it is from the hubs where decisions that affect the lives of each and every one of the planet's inhabitants are taken.

From our position at the south of the world, Chile is cooperating. We have enthusiastically supported, and in some cases promoted, the most diverse initiatives in pursuit of the development of our peoples. A few days ago, in Santiago de Chile, together with the Prime Minister of Norway, we launched an important regional initiative for the attainment of Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean. Under that initiative, Chile will cooperate in the assignment and training of troops in Bolivia, Ecuador and other countries of the region. However, when we say "troops", we are not talking about soldiers. It will be a force of nurses, midwives and doctors specialized in maternal and child health, who will travel through the fields and mountain ranges of our America, delivering babies, helping mothers, providing vaccinations and caring for sick children. Because despite the progress made in that regard in recent years, which has increased the percentage of attended births from 78 to 89 per cent, still 22,000 mothers die in Latin America each year simply because they received no professional care. Despite the improvement in child mortality, 400,000 Latin American children under five years of age are still dying each year — hence, the urgency of that initiative, which is the urgency of promoting democracy and the social development of our people.

In just over two months, the world will have a noble reason for celebration. It will be the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What a great step forward for mankind. That transcendental charter of rights marked the beginning of the end of centuries and centuries of arbitrary action, death, torture and abuse of power. Certainly that charter did not represent an immediate solution, but it did mean the beginning of the largest and most effective social and political mobilization in favour of people's dignity.

Today, those who violate that charter sully their reputation with the international community. We have gone even further by creating an international architecture of protection and legal advancement, in which my region set a great precedent with the inter-American human rights protection system.

We hope that something similar will happen with the Millennium Declaration. We want it to become an ethical and political requirement for all the world's rulers. We want the citizens of every country to protest against famine, poverty and unsanitary conditions. We want discrimination against women to be reason for shame for all those who practise it. We want discrimination against native peoples to be eliminated from the face of the Earth. We want protection of the environment to be part of the vocabulary of every inhabitant of the planet and, definitely, of the priorities of every Government in the world. We want cooperation by those who have the most to be a political as well as a moral obligation. That is Chile's achievable desire, which we have come to present to this General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Chile for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Türk: We are starting this sixty-third session of the General Assembly under the wise and inspiring leadership of our President, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann. We rely on your experience and your political acumen, Sir, and I wish you every success in your work. At the same time, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, who guided the Assembly with great sensitivity and determination. I also wish to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, whose tireless efforts are guiding the United Nations at this turbulent time.

Indeed, we live in a turbulent world at a turbulent time. We need real answers to the accumulated global problems. The era of optimism generated by globalization has come to an end. The eruption of the financial crisis in recent weeks has removed the last shred of doubt about that. The world needs real answers to big questions.

If you asked me to identify the key policy requirement for the United Nations today with a single concept — and in one word — my answer would be this: we live at a time requiring transformation. Transformation should be the key idea of policymaking to guide United Nations action. The United Nations should look to policies with a transformational potential and capable of producing transformational effects in the not-too-distant future. Obviously, that ambitious and general proposition begs further questions. Is the United Nations capable of generating social, political and economic transformation? Does the United Nations of today know what is the main area for the necessary strategic transformation? What needs to be done, by way of transformation, in the most sensitive area of the United Nations mandate, in the area of the maintenance of international peace and security? Allow me to address those questions one by one.

First, is the United Nations capable of generating social and political transformation worldwide? The United Nations has demonstrated such an ability in various areas of its work in the past. United Nations action in the field of human rights offers an excellent example. Later this year we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it does not take much effort to realize how much the change that has occurred in those 60 years owes to the transformational energy of human rights.

Consider this: at the time of the adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948, the world had experienced one of its most traumatic moments. The Second World War was barely over, its aftershocks were still strongly felt, and much of the world was physically destroyed. Stalinist oppression was the dominant feature of the Soviet Union and of a large part of Europe. In Asia and Africa, large populations suffered under the yoke of colonialism. The system of apartheid was being introduced in South Africa. Yet, that was the time when the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlined an optimistic vision of a just society and a better world. Human rights were the genuinely transformational idea of the time and that idea has guided social change and development ever since.

The world of today, while still far from ideal, is substantially better than the world of 1948. Human rights have triumphed in many parts of the world and are making steady progress in others. Many of the oppressive systems have ended in the dustbin of history. The remaining ones are likely to follow. Democracy has progressed globally and is today the way of life of more people than ever before.

Obviously, violations of human rights still persist, as reported by the United Nations experts and by non-governmental organizations. Some of the causes of violations, such as racial discrimination, are persistent and take place in new forms. New issues of human rights have also arisen. Concerns related to security and counter-terrorism seem to have contributed to a diminished care for human rights in some societies. The abhorrent practice of torture has gained a degree of acceptance, which should be a cause for serious concern for all those who take human rights seriously. Armed conflicts continue to produce atrocities and massive violations of human rights.

Those phenomena must be met with resolute counteraction. Human rights institutions need to be strengthened and supported. Human rights education deserves higher priority. The principle of the responsibility to protect must be given real meaning and real teeth through diplomatic and other action. The International Criminal Court has to be accepted and made effective as the key institution for punishing perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Violations of human rights have to be combated wherever they occur.

But in addition, there is an even more fundamental reality that affects the actual enjoyment of human rights by all. The Universal Declaration proclaimed, in its article 28, that everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which their human rights can be fully realized. The authors of the Declaration realistically envisaged the long-term nature of the effort for human rights. Guided by that spirit, the General Assembly adopted, in 1986, its Declaration on the Right to Development, a right which became recognized as universal at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993. That was a significant and realistic recognition of the intrinsic link

between two fundamental human aspirations: the one for human freedom and the other for human development. In subsequent years, the United Nations also developed a comprehensive understanding of what development is and what it means in our era. That understanding was elaborated at a series of global conferences in the 1990s and summarized in the year 2000 in the form of the agreement on global development goals.

The vision exists and practical progress, while still uneven, is visible. The high-level meeting on Africa last Monday strengthened the existing global consensus about the immediate priorities for Africa, including more effective financing for development. The panel discussions on the Millennium Development Goals tomorrow will be an opportunity to discuss the key issues of today, in particular those emerging from the current food crisis. I also hope that the proposal of the Secretary-General for a summit to consider progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in 2010 will gain wide support.

Those and other discussions also help in answering my second question: does the United Nations know the strategic direction in which the transformational effort must be concentrated today? Yes, the Millennium Development Goals are part of the answer, but it is already clear that global development — now and in the foreseeable future — will vitally depend on the preservation of our natural environment and, in particular, on how we address the problems of energy and global warming. The battle for our common, global future will be won — or lost — on the environmental front, and that is where the main transformational effort has to take place. There is no time to lose.

Earlier this year, the European Union, under the presidency of my country, Slovenia, adopted a plan of activities to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Yesterday, President Sarkozy of France, the current President of the European Council, reiterated the European Union commitment to the success of the Bali road map and the Copenhagen conference to be held next year. In the meantime — and I wish to emphasize this — progress must be made at the conference in Poznan, Poland, and in the process leading to the Copenhagen conference and to the final global agreement.

But those efforts will succeed only if an adequate partnership is established among the key economic and political players. Partnership between the European Union, the United States, Japan, China, India and the Group of 77 countries is essential. The existing environmental challenges call for a transformational approach to the way the world consumes energy, the way it develops technology and the way it pursues development. Incremental change will not do. Global cooperation is essential. Obviously — and I would underline this — the responsibilities of the developed and the developing countries are not the same. They are differentiated. But the world as a whole has to move ahead and the United Nations has to get the direction right. Transformation is the order of the day.

My third question relates to the maintenance of international peace and security and the necessary transformation in that area. Allow me to state right at the outset that there is a serious need for transformation of the existing institutions in the field of international security.

The international security landscape today offers a mixed picture. After the end of the cold war, there were moments of high hopes and moments of deep disappointment. There were successes and failures, including the failure to prevent genocide. But we also have to point out that the overall number of armed conflicts has been declining for more than a decade now. That is an encouraging development indeed, and it is in no small measure due to the contribution of the United Nations, which has steadily increased its experience and its capacity in peacekeeping, post-conflict peacebuilding and, to some extent, preventive diplomacy. The role of the Secretary-General has been strengthened in all those areas.

The progress made so far has established a degree of confidence in the capacity of the international security structures and their key players to cooperate and, even more, to work in partnership for the maintenance of international peace and security. However, it appears that the confidence developed thus far is still fragile and that remnants of the cold war mentality are still in existence. Further efforts are therefore needed. Those efforts, in my opinion, involve two basic sets of tasks.

The first set of tasks relates to the development of partnerships to address the key security issues, in particular those in the Middle East, the Caucasus, the

Balkans and several regions of Africa. In all those areas, there has been a degree of success in establishing cooperation and partnership among the key regional and global players working for peace. Models of concerted diplomacy such as the one established to deal with the issues of North Korea can and should inspire preventive diplomacy and peacemaking in other parts of the world.

The second set of tasks is equally urgent. Immediate consideration has to be given to a transformation of the existing security structures. Reform of the Security Council is long overdue. Incremental improvements of its working methods, while welcome, are far from sufficient. The time is ripe for changes in the Council's structure. I believe that the membership of the Security Council should be expanded, and that that should be done in three directions. First, there should be six additional permanent members from every region of the world. Secondly, there should be an additional category of non-permanent members with a more frequent rotation, six in any particular composition of the Security Council, and they should be elected in accordance with a formula to be determined by the General Assembly and alternate every second two-year term. Thirdly, the remaining eight non-permanent members would be elected in accordance with the principle of equitable geographic distribution. This three-point idea means that the total size of the reformed Security Council would not exceed 25 members; it would be a 25-member Council. It would be a more representative Council and, I believe, a more effective one.

I offer those ideas on reform of the Security Council to you, Mr. President, to use in the coming efforts for Council reform. It is widely accepted that that work needs to progress towards a successful conclusion. Success in Council reform would represent a key contribution to the transformation of the international security architecture. Together with other major projects of the United Nations, it would constitute a significant contribution to the improvement of the world.

Allow me to conclude. Is all of this new? In a certain sense, yes, because some of the specific tasks and specific projects are new. But more deeply, the answer is that all of this has to do with continuity. The United Nations has, from its inception, represented the hope for and the promise of an improved world. Let us not betray that hope and let us live up to that promise. Let us work for transformation wherever necessary. Let us make this era the finest hour of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Slovenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Fernández Reyna (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government and people of the Dominican Republic, I am pleased to extend our warmest congratulations to the President of the General Assembly, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of the sister Republic of Nicaragua, on his recent election. We also take this opportunity to greet our fellow Member States in this General Assembly.

Eight years ago, in this same place, representatives of 189 countries undertook a crucial commitment, possibly one of the most transcendental commitments that such a large number of nations ever made. They agreed on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the year 2000, it was believed — and this is still the case today — that the objectives established at that time would go down in the common history of humankind as the bravest ethical decision ever taken in the face of extreme poverty, the shame of generalized injustice and the heartbreaking tragedy of social inequity. It was an agenda of work and dedication that required a large dose of political will, actions laid out in conformity with the goals to be reached, a reorganization of budgetary priorities and a

greater flow of aid resources and support for development.

We did not undertake the Millennium Development Goals in vague terms. We did not couch the Millennium Declaration in abstract and grandiloquent concepts lacking in substance. Quite the contrary, we analysed with the greatest possible rigour the situation that we wanted to correct. We measured with mathematical precision its overwhelming scope and the magnitude of the political and financial effort that its reversal would require.

We committed to the MDGs with such supreme responsibility that we even set a date for their achievement: the year 2015. Now we are halfway to that date, and we face the disheartening situation of an international landscape full of obstacles to overcome if we are to conclude what we set out to do in the year 2000. We knew there would be difficulties. We recognized that we would have to overcome immense obstacles, and we had identified every type of major challenge that would await us in the quest to carry out our plans.

In the Dominican Republic, we have been able to achieve some progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Since 1991, we have reduced by more than half the percentage of five-year-old children who are underweight for their age. We have also made progress in achieving our goals related to health development and have the spread of HIV/AIDS under control.

However, we now know that over and above the limited progress achieved, not just by the Dominican Republic but by developing countries on all continents, more than half a million women still die every year from complications of pregnancy and childbirth that could be treated and prevented. We now know that, unless an extraordinary effort is made from now on, instead of reaching the goal of reducing by half the proportion of children of low birth weight, their number will grow to over 30 million. We also know that in 2006, the number of deaths caused by AIDS rose to almost 3 million and that the preventive measures against that ominous pandemic remain grossly insufficient. Also disheartening is the fact that more than 600 million people will not have better health services than the ones they currently have access to.

Now, at the same time that this is occurring, the richest nations, which committed to providing extraordinary official development assistance in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, have in general fallen short in carrying out their pledges. Only five of those nations — Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Luxembourg — have honoured their commitments, making contributions equal to and in some cases greater than the 0.7 per cent of their gross national income established as appropriate by this world Organization.

Nonetheless, we can be sure that, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we will now require a financial rescue plan from the international community — in a sort of bailout, as it is referred to nowadays. According to studies by the World Bank, a yearly average of approximately $50 billion in foreign aid would be needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. That is to say that achieving the goals of improving the quality of life and dignity in the living conditions of the poorest nations of the world would require an international economic financing plan as bold and as urgent as that currently being undertaken to save Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, Bear Stearns, Merrill Lynch, AIG and other financial institutions. In other words, over the next seven years, until 2015, the date established for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, according to the criteria of the World Bank, we would need $350 billion of foreign aid. That represents half of the amount that is being debated at this very moment in the United States Congress to save from bankruptcy the financial businesses of Wall Street responsible for their own failures.

The people of the world affected by hunger and misery are crying out to the international community to lend the same urgent attention to the resolution of their plight that has been given to efforts to rescue banking institutions on the brink of collapse. We cannot entertain the idea that rescuing the dignity of the world's poor is less important or urgent as rescuing the institutions operating in the world's most important financial centre.

We would like it to be clear that we have not come here to condemn anyone. We have not come to point a finger at any friendly nation that is a Member of the United Nations family. Rather, we wish to sound the alarm and be a voice that troubles the conscience and calls for a solution to a problem that affects all

poor nations and is socially unjust and ethically unacceptable.

We would like to use this forum, however, to highlight other factors that hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the progress of our nations. Such is the case, for example, of the unregulated speculation in the buying and selling of futures contracts for oil and food. There is no way to hide the fact that, without regulation, the futures markets are mechanisms that lend themselves through excessive speculation, fraud and manipulation to a distortion of the fundamental principles of economic activity. We do not question the fact that, with respect to the determination of oil prices, supply has not increased significantly while demand has increased; that there has been insufficient investment in new refineries in recent years; that there are geopolitical tensions in various parts of the world, or that the United States dollar has decreased in value. All of that is true.

What we do question, however, is the fact, that in just 12 months, the price of a barrel of oil rose from $70 to almost $150. In July, we were stupefied to see the price of a barrel of oil rise $10 in a single day. Just two days ago, while we were here in New York, we saw with great perplexity an increase of not just $10 but $25 per barrel in a single day. How can we explain that? Is it that suddenly, in just one day, the whole world increased its demand so abruptly, or did the world's oil wells unexpectedly disappear?

In reality, there is but one explanation: excessive speculation in the futures markets. It is incomprehensible that some can sell something they do not have while others can buy what they do not expect to receive. However, that is what has been happening recently, in the clearest example of so-called casino capitalism.

In just five years, hundreds of billions of dollars have entered the commodities futures markets, largely directed towards energy, while prices shot up by more than 200 per cent between July 2003 and July 2008. That has occurred not just with a few commodities, but with every single one of the 25 products on the world market index for commodities. In the past five years, the price of wheat has gone up by 177 per cent, soy by 196 per cent and corn by 214 per cent.

Nevertheless, we must reiterate here that what has the greatest impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is skyrocketing oil prices. In the Dominican Republic, our oil bill has risen from $1.667 billion in 2004 to a projected $6.5 billion this year. That represents a difference of almost 500 per cent. With that difference of $5 billion, the Dominican Republic could have financed every public investment laid out in the cost analyses of the Millennium Development Goals from 2008 to 2015.

The world does not aspire to be a gambling den. The world does not want continuous manipulation or permanent fraud in regard to factors that have a decisive effect on the quality of life. The world, in fact, has very simple aspirations: to live in conditions of social justice and equity, with the creation of opportunities so that every human being can develop his or her creative potential, both material and spiritual.

For the achievement of such noble objectives, the States that have committed themselves to realizing the MDGs as an agenda of true and genuine social transformation turn to the United Nations system with optimism and hope that it can correct and make up for existing distortions.

We trust that with so many intelligent persons meeting here, working towards a better life for all of humankind, important solutions will be brought to the table with the same speed, urgency and interest that are being shown in drawing up rescue plans for bankrupt banks during these turbulent times in the world of finance.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Dominican Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Leonel Fernández Reina, President of the Dominican Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, President of the United Mexican States

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the United Mexican States.

Mr. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, President of the United Mexican States, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, President of the United Mexican States, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Calderón Hinojosa (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all to congratulate you, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, on your election to the presidency of this Assembly. It is truly an honour for Latin America to have you leading our work.

I have come to the United Nations to reaffirm Mexico's permanent commitment to strengthen our multilateral system and to build a world order that is more human, more just, more prosperous, cleaner and more secure.

The problems and challenges that are faced today by humankind demand a renewed and strengthened United Nations. Mexico is convinced that the United Nations is at a definitive historical moment. Global challenges of the twenty-first century are testing the leadership and the vitality of the Organization.

Threats to global security are not only the result of conflicts between States, but of the challenges posed by the activities of non-State actors such as international organized crime groups dealing in terrorism and drug trafficking. Those threats also include the degradation of the environment, pandemics, extreme poverty and massive violations of human rights.

I would like to start with a first challenge for our generation and our civilization. Few challenges are as urgent as reversing the effects of climate change. This phenomenon affects indiscriminately rich countries as well as poor, and paradoxically those that have contributed the least to it are often those that are the most vulnerable.

Climate change is not a problem to be faced by nations according to their degree of development. It is a task that requires moving from words to action substantiated in concrete proposals that are based on the principles of common, but differentiated responsibilities.

Mexico has accordingly proposed the establishment, within the United Nations of a Green Fund that will provide incentives for States to redouble their efforts in this area. It is a great satisfaction for us to see that organizations like the World Bank have already taken the initiative to broaden the availability of resources for the benefit of the countries that need them.

And so today, before this Assembly, I reaffirm on behalf of my country the proposal of Mexico to set up such a Green Fund to which each State can all contribute according to its economic capacity and that all of us could use in order to finance programmes to cut emissions, increase energy efficiency or establish measures for adapting to climate change.

I respectfully call upon all nations, especially the most developed, to contribute to the establishment of this Green Fund for the creation of financial instruments to protect the world's environment.

As the Mexican Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz said:

> "Whatever the form of political and social organization adopted by nations, the most immediate and pressing issue is the survival of the natural environment. To defend nature is to defend humankind."

We have no time or margin of error to avoid our responsibility with regard to another global challenge that particularly affects the poor: the international rise of food prices. We must act decisively to prevent that situation from annulling the efforts we have made to overcome poverty.

In order to guarantee food security, the Government of Mexico has developed an action plan that aims to facilitate access to the supply of food and includes a sharp reduction of taxes on commodity imports, the enhancement of production, irrigation infrastructure and productivity in the countryside, the establishment of a national strategic reserve of commodities and an increase in direct and conditional financial grants to the 6 million poorest families in the country as compensation for the rise in food prices.

Indeed, many countries not only will be unable to meet the targets set at the 2000 World Summit, but have already experienced setbacks in the fight against poverty because of the phenomenon of high food prices. Despite that unfavourable environment, Mexico is achieving practically all of the Millennium Development Goals. In fact, we have set additional objectives that are reflected in our national development plan. To meet that challenge, Mexico has promoted a significant increase in its social spending,

including in education, health and human development. Next year, we shall allocate $125 billion, or 60 per cent of our budget, to social spending.

Let me cite some examples. A conditional direct transfer programme known as Opportunities, which enables families belonging to the most vulnerable groups of the population to send their children to school or to make regular visits to the doctor, has made it possible to reduce the country's rate of extreme poverty. Over the past 10 years, the number of persons living in extreme poverty has fallen from 38 million to fewer than 15 million. We have also achieved universal coverage in basic education. In addition, we have set a very clear goal of achieving, by 2011, every country's ideal in the area of health: universal coverage, including medical care, medicine and treatment, for all Mexican women and men.

We are living in an era of shared responsibility. Everyone knows that, in a globalized world, the consequences of our actions transcend the territories of our countries and affect the entire planet. The security threats faced by Mexico and Latin America are a good example of shared challenges; the illicit trade in drugs, weapons and human persons knows no borders. Today, Latin America is one of the regions with the highest numbers of violent deaths in the world, and that has become one of the major limitations to our development.

In Mexico, we are decisively addressing the delinquency and organized crime that threaten our society and our democratic institutions. Mexican families have decided to live in a Mexico of peace and laws — a Mexico in which neither impunity nor crime is tolerated. That is why we have begun to tackle crime head on. However, that requires shared international responsibility. Mexico reiterates its appeal to all nations to seek new forms of cooperation against those threats. The eradication of those scourges is a guiding principle of Mexico's national security policy and of the international agenda that we are promoting.

In addition to those problems, there is an increasing questioning of the principles and values defended by the United Nations — principles and values that were once believed to have taken root in the community of States. Some have called into question the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights, citing security requirements or the pre-eminence of economic and social rights. In commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mexico calls on Member States to defend the universal values that are a precondition for human development and the rule of law.

Migratory flows are another global phenomenon of our time. In today's world, more than 200 million people live outside their countries of origin. The causes of international migration are complex, ranging from the consolidation of integration processes to the demand for labour, the lack of adequate economic conditions and the persistence of internal or inter-State conflicts. Included in that population are millions of Mexicans living here in the United States, who have sought opportunities for a dignified life for their families.

Migration cannot be reduced to the issue of security, nor can it be managed as merely an economic phenomenon. That is why Mexico believes that the international community must view it in a comprehensive manner that permits migratory flows to be legal, safe, orderly and respectful of human dignity. The United Nations must fully shoulder its responsibility in the light of that global phenomenon, guided by the principle of shared responsibility among the countries of origin, transit and destination.

Terrorism, regardless of its justifications or ideological motivations, has no place in the community of values that we have forged with such great difficulty. Mexico condemns it and reaffirms its readiness to cooperate on the basis of international law to prevent terrorist acts and punish their perpetrators.

The paradox is that all those problems can be dealt with and resolved only through global action, which requires the mediation of the United Nations.

We Mexicans do not wish to shirk our global responsibilities, nor will we do so. We want to be actors in — not observers of — the world's transformations. We have decided to strengthen our activism. Mexico has the eleventh largest population and the twelfth largest economy in the world, and we have a long tradition of contributing to peace and international law.

Therefore, we want to occupy a place of responsibility and commitment to the common good of nations. That is why Mexico has submitted its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security

Council for the period 2009-2010. If elected, my country will commit itself to acting on the basis of the fundamental values of the international community: the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes; prohibition of the use or threat of use of force; and compliance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and human rights.

We aspire to participate in the Security Council in order to promote Mexico's democratic ideals, which uphold the rule of law. We would strive to support the Council's efforts to rebuild societies and institutions torn apart by war and by emerging threats. We would work to ensure the settlement of disputes between States at the earliest possible stage before the International Court of Justice, as well as compliance with its decisions.

Our generation has a historic responsibility to act, here and now, to meet the challenges of humankind in the twenty-first century. It is our conviction that the United Nations is the forum that best represents the diversity of human beings, the plurality of nations and our civilization's collective aspirations to well-being and progress. It is a privileged alliance formed to ensure a world of peace and justice, security and development, with well-being and opportunities for all.

Multilateralism is the path of the twenty-first century. It is a comprehensive response to globalization. In the new global era, we also need a strengthened and renewed global Organization. We must join forces in order to make it possible for the United Nations to turn into reality the dream of its founders: peace, security and development for all the peoples of the planet.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the United Mexican States for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, President of the United Mexican States, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Senegal.

Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Wade (*spoke in French*): Mr. Miguel d'Escoto, in electing you to the presidency of the Assembly, Member States wished to show their confidence in your wealth of experience, as former Minister for Foreign Affairs, to successfully guide its work. The Senegalese delegation congratulates you through me. At the same time I wish to thank and congratulate our Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who has taken many initiatives since he was elected as the leader of our Organization, as demonstrated by the recent meetings dealing with Africa.

Many heads of State have referred to the dizzying increase in the price of oil, including, just now, the President of the Dominican Republic. That is not by chance, because many of us have denounced the policy of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which establishes the price of oil as it wishes and tries to blame it on the increase in demand — as if we had never studied economics.

The assessments of our association have not been very optimistic, but it should be noted that the objectives set by the founding Members have not been achieved. I quote from the birth certificate of our Organization that one of the purposes was "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". I believe that the United Nations has served humanity considerably by resolving some conflicts and by establishing lasting peace, but we must also recognize its shortcomings in many areas, including peace and in the economic field.

Today, populations throughout the world have great expectations of our meeting, because humanity, fortunately, still hopes, and that hope remains alive in the countries that are called poor, and indeed they are. But I usually say with regard to Africa that it is not poor, but rather that Africa is a continent that has been impoverished over five centuries of slavery and one century of colonization and exploitation. However, despite all of that, Africa has engaged itself in international cooperation — bilateral and multilateral.

We also strive to contribute within the United Nations, for example to peace, which is one of the objectives of our Organization.

Experience teaches us that there are limits to our international system. As you, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General have both mentioned, we should look directly at the issues and undertake reforms. Above all, we must demonstrate imagination and a capacity for innovation.

The first issue of concern to us is to feed Africa. We must substitute this idea of food aid, which was at the origin of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and replace it with the concept of assistance to agriculture, because we have demonstrated that we are able to carry out agriculture just like developed countries. Unfortunately, we suffer from certain shortages, including seeds, fertilizer and equipment, as I will show in a moment. In place of traditional financing, we need to imagine what is referred to now as innovative financing.

In June 2008, we raised an alarm over the increase in the price of basic commodities and especially of food products. The Secretary-General asked FAO to meet in Rome with heads of State. We dropped everything in order to go to Rome and respond to that appeal, believing that real solutions would be proposed. Solutions were proposed, but we are still waiting for them to be implemented. At the same time, I drew attention to the fact that the countries of the Sahel region have three to four months of rain each year, during which time one could grow whatever one wanted if one had the means to do so. That is followed by eight or nine months of drought.

We launched that appeal, but like the doctor who arrives after the death, no one responded. Fortunately for Senegal, we foresaw difficulties due to the weighty global mechanisms and launched a programme called the Great Agricultural Offensive for Agriculture and Abundance. We were told it was too ambitious because it amounted to $800 million.

The project, which began at the end of May, will be completed in a month. I have the pleasure to inform the Assembly that, beyond meeting its food needs, Senegal has met the challenge of achieving a surplus. Six months ago, Senegal was among the most food-dependent countries, importing all its food, including more than 600,000 tons of rice annually. But a look at Senegal today reveals that there is green everywhere. I called on all Senegalese everywhere, including in the Senegalese diaspora, to farm as much as they wanted — on 10, 20 or 1,000 hectares — so long as it was food. That great offensive, as I have said, has unquestionably been a great success. The world will not see Senegal launching an appeal for food assistance. We have solved the problem and hope that we have solved it once and for all.

Admittedly, we could not have done it without God's help. The programme required $100 million, a third of which was to be devoted to fertilizer. Fortunately, our country is endowed with phosphate deposits that can be directly used as fertilizer for crops, thus enabling us to save one third of the cost of our investment in the programme. This has been possible because of the belief I have adhered to for more than 50 years. I have said for a long time that we could find phosphate. We have now gone out to find that hidden wealth. As I said in jest about the previous regimes, God had hidden it from them, but we managed to find it.

Africa has responded to the call to protect the environment. President Obasanjo and I launched the Great Green Wall Initiative, whereby a band of trees 15 kilometres wide and 7,000 kilometres long will stretch from Dakar to Djibouti. Once again, we were told that it was a dream. No, as I speak, since, in the words of the philosopher, we believe in going forward by walking, Senegal is in the process of building 587 kilometres of the Great Green Wall. Everyone has supported us in this endeavour — France, the United States, the European Union — at least in words. We are looking forward to your support, especially from the scientists, who we hope will help us to choose drought-resistant plants. It is possible. I contacted scientists through the Internet. They came from all over the world — Europe, the United States, American universities and Australia. I accordingly called for the help now of the Science Without Borders association. I invited scientists to Senegal because their knowledge comes free of charge, and they are always willing to make it available for the benefit of humankind.

The Great Green Wall will be backed by what we call retention basins. Billions of tons of water that fall during the rainy season are lost to runoff or the sea. We are trying to capture that water, as is being done so well in countries such as Burkina Faso. We in Senegal are making that a systematic effort. The World Bank

has labelled our effort conclusive, and we also want to build a green strip from Dakar to Djibouti.

Africa is therefore responding to the call of the international community to protect the environment. However, I cannot fail to point out that the African coast is in the process of disappearing, with several centimetres being lost from Morocco to the Gulf of Guinea each year. In that connection, a first meeting was held in Cotonou a few days ago to address the issue of coastal erosion.

As the Assembly is aware, the Secretary-General has issued a challenge to Africa. Not long ago, the World Bank indicated that five African countries were capable of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including Senegal. The Secretary-General has said that no African country would achieve the Millennium Development Goals. I, for my part, respond to challenges. I shall meet that challenge for Senegal, I shall take it up, and that is not a dream. Not long ago, Senegal was very far down on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index. Just a few days ago, thanks to our targeted efforts to overcome our shortcomings, Senegal was classified as the first country in Africa for doing business, and the fifth in the world.

Child and maternal mortality is one of the obstacles to overcoming our shortcomings. After giving thought to the problem, we decided a week ago in Senegal that, so long as the problem is left up to the State, we will not make progress. We have instituted a new approach that entails putting in charge a woman in each neighbourhood of the affected areas to monitor pregnancies and help pregnant women to visit doctors, as well as to immediately inform the authorities of any problems. We hope that will enable us to reduce child and maternal mortality. We are even going so far as to provide cell phones to women in the interior of Senegal so that they can report cases to health-care centres.

There is also a need to establish a new mechanism to mobilize resources. That was our goal in setting up a pilot group for solidarity levies to fund development. We have also launched a digital solidarity fund. We Africans have done that, with the support of the entire world. We are therefore on our way to bridging the digital divide identified by the Secretary-General.

As we begin our work here, more than 1 billion Muslims throughout the world are fasting in accordance with one of Islam's five pillars. Apart from religion, for every Muslim the fast is a code of behaviour inspired by the lofty values of peace, sharing, forgiveness, respect and brotherly love, irrespective of religion. On the basis of the letter and spirit of the message of Islam, which are being celebrated during this Holy month of Ramadan, and in my capacity as Chairman-in-Office of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, I should like here to reiterate the adherence of the Islamic Umma to the principles of the culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations. We affirm that we condemn extremism, violence, intolerance and discrimination, which are contrary to the teachings of Islam and which our religion condemns as a source of unhappiness and discord. It is for that reason that we are willing to engage in a dialogue with all civilizations.

The United Nations ideal of peace continues to be tested by the reality of conflicts in the world. Although we have certainly seen fewer trouble spots in Africa, conflict still rages in Chad, the Sudan and Darfur. We, for our part, will always continue to give our active support to peace and the United Nations.

Quite sincerely, however, I believe that there will be no solution in Darfur until we disarm all armed groups, which have been clearly identified. As for Zimbabwe, we welcome the progress that is being made. In Mauritania, we, as a neighbouring country, are very concerned about what is taking place. But I should like to reiterate here that we very much believe in the rule of law of the Republic, in accordance with the position outlined by the African Union.

We are also continuing our efforts in the Middle East, as we have been called on to give our support to intra-Palestinian dialogue and to dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

For many years now, I have consistently bemoaned the ineffectiveness of economic thinking. The failure from which we are suffering today is the failure of economists and financiers and, more generally, of the intelligentsia. I greatly appreciate the appeal just made to the intelligentsia made by the President of the Dominican Republic.

I continue to believe that the solution to the crisis is not to be found in the North; crises begin in the North, but we will not find their solutions in the North.

The global economy moved from Europe to the United States where it created a new centre of development that has underpinned the global economy for almost 200 years. Now that economy is running out of steam because of crises like the one we are facing today.

President Bush has told us about a solution advocated by his financiers, but I am sorry: the solution to the North's crisis lies in the South; the solution lies in Africa.

Rather than allowing capital to roam in every direction to create inflationary situations, I think it better, as a Keynesian thinker, to call on Members to invest in the creation of wealth and jobs in Africa, a continent possessed of great material and human resources and capable of taking its turn as the engine of the exhausted global economy. That economy, which left Europe for the United States, will finally be developed in Africa.

That is why we call on the entire world to invest in Africa because it is there that I sincerely believe that the last advances will be achieved. It is true that some trouble spots remain — as in every country — but with the support of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, and with all people of goodwill, we are sure that Africa will be able to play that role, provided of course that Africans are trained as soon as possible to assume that historic mission.

It is on this note of hope and as Vice-President of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and President-in-Office of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) that I make an appeal to all countries to continue supporting efforts for peace and continue supporting investment efforts in Africa.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Senegal for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Pohamba (Namibia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Karzai: Since the last time we gathered here in this great Hall, we have passed a year of great hopes and grave fears. We have witnessed the hope-inspiring glory of human accomplishment at the Olympic Games in Beijing but shuddered at crumbling stock and housing markets around the world. We have a growing global understanding on climate change and the issues relevant to it, but seen millions of lives threatened by the shortage of food in many countries and witnessed with disbelief the brutal slaughter of innocent people at the hands of terrorists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Algeria and several other parts of the world.

Since I spoke at this rostrum in the last session of the General Assembly, my country, Afghanistan, has grappled with a number of important challenges, none more troubling than the problem of international terrorism. Terrorist forces have significantly increased their attacks and brutality, and enjoyed freedom in their sanctuaries.

While Afghanistan has borne the brunt of terrorist violence, the scourge has now spread like a wildfire across the wider region. In Pakistan, where, until recently, extremist circles remained mainly focused on destabilizing Afghanistan, today terrorist violence is unfortunately also directed within Pakistani territory and against the Pakistani people.

Daily acts of intimidation and violence against communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular on both sides of the Durand Line, the killing of political and tribal leaders and the burning of schools are the upshots of the continued spawning and spread of terrorism and extremism in the region.

The callous attack on the Marriot hotel in Islamabad over the weekend, the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul and the terrorist attacks in the Indian cities of Bangalore and Ahmedabad were the most disturbing demonstration of terrorists' growing reach.

Undoubtedly, terrorism will not go away until we dismantle the elaborate institutional support terrorists enjoy in the region and eliminate their secure sanctuaries. That will be possible only if we engage in sincere regional and international cooperation.

The democratic transition in Pakistan, heralded by the historic elections of last February, has been a most promising development in our region.

We in Afghanistan have warmly welcomed the inauguration of the civilian democratic Government. In particular, I take the opportunity to once again congratulate my brother, President Asif Ali Zardari, on his election as the President of Pakistan. I assure my brothers, President Zardari and Prime Minister Gillani, that Afghanistan stands ready to take several steps for each single step that Pakistan will take to address the challenge of radicalism and terrorism.

To the extent that terrorism in our region continues to be a global threat, evolving in nature and tactics, the struggle against it must continue unabated. In this context, I recall with appreciation this year's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in Bucharest, where around 40 countries with existing military commitments in Afghanistan once again reiterated their strong resolve to stay the course.

Among the most significant outcomes of the summit was the emphasis on the Afghanization of the security sector as a measure to ensure sustainability and enhanced effectiveness. To that end, I call for a redoubling of efforts by the international community aimed at enabling the Afghan national security institutions, both the army and the police, to take on a greater share of the war against terrorism and for the protection of our people.

Above all, Afghanization of military operations is vital if the problem of civilian casualties is to be addressed effectively. The continuation of civilian casualties could seriously undermine the legitimacy of the fight against terrorism and the credibility of the Afghan people's partnership with the international community.

Whereas the military endeavour at the regional and international levels remains the primary response to the threat of terrorism, success will only be possible if the local population is empowered to confront it. Therefore, while terrorism and a persistent environment of insecurity are at work to subvert Afghanistan's growth, we must do what it takes to win the battle of Afghanistan's economic development.

Last June, my Government launched the Afghanistan National Development Strategy at the Afghanistan donors conference in Paris. If the pledges made at the conference are translated into timely commitments, I am confident that we will attain the development goals set out in our Strategy.

On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I thank President Nicholas Sarkozy of France for his leadership in excellently organizing the Paris conference. I also thank the United States and all the other countries around the world that pledged generously towards the implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

As in the security sector, Afghanization of the development process is the key not just to the goal of ensuring ownership but also to the effective implementation of our Development Strategy. Afghanization of the development process can be achieved through a meaningful commitment by our friends and donors to aid effectiveness. In that context, while urging a shift away from the use of parallel structures and wasteful mechanisms, I strongly endorse the role of the United Nations and the special representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kai Eide, in coordinating the international community's participation in Afghanistan's development and State-building processes.

Thanks to the selfless sacrifices of men and women of Member States and the determination and sacrifices of our own people, the journey of Afghanistan's reconstruction is resolutely under way. Today our people are more educated, healthier, better off and more optimistic about their future. We have built thousands of new schools and reconstructed many more, where millions of our youngsters go to school and prepare for the responsibilities of tomorrow. Our rapid economic growth, with double-digit growth rates almost every year, has resulted in higher income and better living conditions for our people. Our rural development programmes have improved lives in

thousands of our villages that had never before seen an agent of the State among them.

We have also taken a number of legal and institutional measures to intensify our anti-corruption efforts, such as establishing the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, including special units in the Office of the Attorney-General and in the judiciary to oversee efforts aimed at eliminating corruption through preventive, educational and enforcement measures. We are committed to ensuring more concrete results in the coming years.

Also very important, on counter-narcotics, this year we have registered a 20 per cent decline in total opium production, while the number of poppy-free provinces has reached 18, making 50 per cent of the country virtually poppy-free. The key to sustaining our success will be ensuring alternative livelihoods for our farmers, investing to a greater extent in law enforcement and interdiction and, above all, addressing the far greater dimensions of the world's drug trade that lie outside Afghanistan, such as reduction of demand in foreign markets and stricter border controls.

Our efforts in counter-narcotics and in other areas have been complicated by the acute shortage of food within the country. In collaboration with the United Nations, we have launched a humanitarian appeal that we hope will receive a timely response from our partners in the international community.

The United Nations Charter promises freedom, justice, a dignified life, security and peace, and it is incumbent on all of us to work together to ensure that those promises are kept. Today, there are still too many corners of the world where conflict and tension are putting the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in jeopardy.

We deeply sympathize with our Palestinian brothers and sisters and their struggle and suffering. We urge a just and comprehensive settlement that fully realizes the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State, living in peace, side by side with the State of Israel.

Today, once again, this Assembly session has brought us together at a time when our world is poised between great opportunities and menacing challenges. I am confident that we will make use of our growing collective ability as a community of nations to do what is right for the betterment of our world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Compaore (*spoke in French*): I would like to warmly congratulate Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann, on his election to preside over our debates and to assure him of the full support of Burkina Faso. I would also like to express to his predecessor, Mr. Kerim, all my appreciation for the skill with which he guided the work of the sixty-second session.

It is also my pleasure to pay well-deserved tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who is investing his efforts with foresight and dedication to ensure the success of the reform of our Organization in order to build a safer world and to ensure continuing progress. I would like to reiterate in particular our warm thanks to him for the visit he made to our country last April.

This session of the General Assembly is taking place at the midpoint in the timetable for attaining the Millennium Development Goals and in an international context marked by threats to global peace. The food and energy crises have been joined by a financial crisis of exceptional seriousness. This session is therefore crucial and provides us with a great opportunity to assess the measures that have been taken and to take the necessary corrective measures.

In that respect, I welcome the initiative to organize a high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Millennium Development Goals. The

conclusions of that meeting, I firmly believe, will help us to establish appropriate strategies to speed up the achievement of the Goals.

The current food crisis throughout the world has amply demonstrated the ineffectiveness of our agricultural policies and the fragility of our production and trading systems. It is urgent to improve how international institutions function, to relaunch investment in agriculture and to support farmers' and professional organizations in innovative partnerships. To that end, it is important that we commit ourselves to major investment in farming, improved organization for producers, greater control of water resources, more effective distribution of seeds and fertilizers, and simpler access to land.

The energy crisis helps us to prioritize our search for lasting solutions in favour of renewable resources — solar, nuclear, wind and bioenergy resources — because of the impact of energy-related factors on States' development strategies.

Official development assistance has decreased in recent years in terms of the level of funding and its effectiveness. Beyond the central and recurring question of the level of official development assistance, there are four other dimensions that I believe are crucial. Those dimensions are, first, ownership of economic policies and support for capacity-building in governance in our States; secondly, harmonizing and simplifying donor procedures; thirdly, the gradual alignment of assistance with national development priorities and programmes; and fourthly, improved coordination between our technical and financial partners on the ground, under the leadership of Governments.

Those are the main requirements with regard to ensuring more effective public aid. I take this opportunity to express my thanks to all our development partners who have always supported us as we strive for encouraging results.

The scourge of drugs and narcotics is a threat to Africa in general and the West African subregion in particular. Used as departure and transit points for exporting illegal drugs, some parts of our countries are experiencing a genuine cross-border crime wave. The rapid eradication of that scourge requires the solidarity and active support of the international community.

With regard to environmental issues, the international community must invest more if it is to bring appropriate responses to the climate change affecting our planet. Scientific and political ideas must be aimed today at protecting and preserving a fully functioning ecosystem for future generations.

Resolving conflicts throughout the world, and particularly on the African continent, represents a major challenge for the community of nations. Burkina Faso, which currently holds the presidency of the Economic Community of West African States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union is making its contribution to enhancing peace and security, which are indispensable to ensuring progress and democracy. In Africa, centres of tension remain, but we can welcome the remarkable progress achieved by numerous mediation efforts in various regions, which have demonstrated the capacity of Africans to resolve their disputes for themselves.

In Darfur, the Security Council's decision has allowed the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation. Burkina Faso, which is taking part in that peacekeeping operation, welcomes the appointment of Mr. Djibril Yipené Bassolé as the Joint African Union-United Nations Chief Mediator for Darfur. Given the complexity of his mission, I call on the international community to give him its full support and to ensure a rapid resumption of the political dialogue and to strengthen the operational capacities of the hybrid force.

We are also concerned by the erosion of the Somali State and its post-electoral crises. With regard to Western Sahara, we are encouraged by the efforts made by the parties to the conflict, particularly the Kingdom of Morocco, and by the Security Council's call for a realistic settlement.

The Sahelo-Saharan region has been affected by persistent insecurity for many years. Collective efforts at dialogue and cooperation are required to restore peace and security there. In that regard, we welcome and support the Algiers accord reached recently between the Government of Mali and the Tuareg rebels.

Burkina Faso also welcomes the progress made in the Middle East. The strengthening of Lebanese sovereignty, the creation of a viable Palestinian State and security guarantees for Israel will contribute to establishing lasting peace in that region.

With regard to the Iranian nuclear issue, I hope that reason will prevail and that negotiations will reconcile Iran's rights to civil nuclear power and the legitimate fears of the international community with regard to military nuclear proliferation.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, the situation continues to be tragic and to claim new victims every day, most of whom are innocent civilians. Burkina Faso will continue to invest with the entire international community in re-establishing peace in those countries.

The news today is dominated by the conflict taking place in the Caucasus. While reasserting its support for negotiations by the European Union, Burkina Faso hopes that the solution to the crisis will be based on inclusive dialogue and respect for international legality.

I note with pleasure an improvement in relations between the Republic of China or Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. I deeply hope that this new spirit will open the way to Taiwan's participation in the activities of international organizations.

For many years now, the United Nations has been committed to a process of reforms that should lead to the improved effectiveness of its activities in the face of the demands of the modern world. Despite the progress that has been made, much remains to be done. Our resolve to reach that goal must remain constant.

Burkina Faso has deep faith in multilateralism and solidarity among peoples. We reassert our willingness to make our contribution wherever it is requested to maintain and consolidate peace, development and democracy.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Burkina Faso for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the State of Israel.

Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Peres: Over 60 years have passed since the General Assembly voted on the historic resolution that would have put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Resolution 181 (II) called for the establishment of a Jewish State and an Arab State. Its title was: "Plan of Partition with Economic Union". It envisioned two States for two peoples, fulfilling a distinct national aspiration. The Jewish people adopted the resolution and established the State of Israel. The Arabs rejected it, and this led to war.

What happened in the ensuing years is much different from the resolution's original intent. While much has changed since then, the ironies of history summon similar circumstances today. Today, again, we are in the middle of the lake. There is no sense going back. Continuing forward will show how near we are to achieving the initial goal.

A year prior to Israel's declaration of statehood, its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, called me, a young man from a kibbutz, to serve in our national defence. Since then, I have participated in Israel's dynamic realities: the building of security; the striving for peace. So, I need no books to learn the history, since I witnessed its miraculous unfolding. We went through seven wars. All have paid heavily. Tears still flow down the faces of bereaved mothers. Remembrance days fill the air with silent prayers of widowed families who lost young boys and girls in battle. They are, today, the same age, but lifeless.

Israel turned military victories into peace processes, knowing that the cost of life renders imperfect peace superior to perfect victories.

We have also achieved two peace agreements: the first, with the largest Arab country, Egypt; the second, with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. All the land, all the water, all the natural resources that fell into our hands through war were completely repatriated after peace was signed.

But for peace, the call in our region is to repair the damaged environment and the wounded land which leads to poverty. If we do not overcome the desert, the thirst, the pollution, they will overcome us. Joint

ventures can meet this call. Nature does not carry a national passport.

With the Palestinians, we negotiate full peace. Both parties agreed to building a Palestinian State side by side with Israel, living in peace, security and respect. We tried to conclude those negotiations this year. Apparently, this will take a longer time. I believe it can be accomplished, in spite of this, within the next year.

I know that our Prime Minister is more than ready to conclude an agreement. And knowing President Abbas as well, I am sure he will not miss this opportunity. We agreed to progress in spite of possible changes that may take place in the leadership. Gaps have been narrowed through negotiations, particularly, and hopefully, the territorial ones.

But peace is not just a matter of territorial compromise. Rogue politics rejects peace even when and where territorial disputes have been resolved. In Lebanon, we implemented the resolutions of the United Nations, but Hizbullah paralysed the country and cut the road to peace.

From Gaza, we withdrew completely and dismantled all of our settlements. I know there are a great many complaints about the settlements: in Gaza, we dismantled 30 settlements by order of the Government; Hamas responded with a bloody takeover and turned the Strip into a base for rocket fire.

These militants offer no positive alternative but the agonies of Job. They added kidnapping to bombings, bringing strife to innocent families. From this rostrum, I call for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit, the son of Aviva and Noam, a most peace-loving family. This Assembly should place the release of that person at the top of its priorities. Holding a hostage in Gaza, causes Gaza's isolation and could cause further deterioration.

At the centre of this violence and fanaticism stands Iran. It presents a danger to the entire world. Its quest for religious hegemony and regional dominance divides the Middle East and holds back chances for peace, including among Arabs, while undermining human rights.

Iranian support for Hizbullah divides Lebanon. Its support for Hamas splits the Palestinians; it postpones the establishment of the Palestinian State. Yesterday, from this very rostrum, the Iranian leader renewed the darkest anti-Semitic libel — the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" — bringing to life one of the ugliest plots against the Jewish people. Their despicable denial of the Holocaust is a mockery of indisputable evidence and a cynical offence against the survivors of the Holocaust, contrary to the resolutions adopted by this very Assembly.

Iran continues to develop enriched uranium and long-range missiles. It has introduced a religion of fear, opposing the call of the Lord to respect human life: all humans; all life. The Iranian people are not our enemies. Their fanatical leadership is their problem and the world's woe. Their leader is a danger to his own people, to the region and to the world. He is a disgrace to the ancient Iranian people and tradition. He is a disgrace to the values of Islam and all religions. He is a disgrace to this House, the United Nations, and its basic principles and values. His appearance here is a shame.

The Jewish people have known throughout history that they must stand firm and face evil. Enlightened humanity should make it possible for freedom and respect to prevail for all of us.

Tehran combines long-range missiles with short-range minds. It is pregnant with tragedies. The General Assembly and the Security Council bear the responsibility to prevent agonies before they take place.

Israel has shown that democracies can defend themselves. We are able to defend ourselves. We do not intend to change that capacity to defend ourselves.

Terrorism has not solved a single problem. It never has; it never will. It will make the world ungovernable. If groups of killers are allowed to threaten innocent masses, the world — if it continues to survive — will be without order and security, a hopeless battleground. The free world must unite to stop this, to combat it.

Israel, for its part, shall continue to seek peace sincerely and fully. We suggest immediate peace with Lebanon. Israeli Prime Ministers have indicated to Syria that, for peace, we are ready to explore a comprehensive compromise. To gain trust and save time, we have suggested a face-to-face meeting with President Assad. I say to the President: "Follow the successful example set by President Sadat and King Hussein". We await an answer.

I know there is a growing concern that peace is far away. My lifelong experience provides me with a different judgement. True, I have seen stagnation, regression and failure in our journey, but today I can identify a road leading in the right direction. In addition to the peace agreements, a series of summits have taken place: Madrid, Oslo, Wye, Camp David, Sharm el-Sheik, Annapolis. In fact, Israelis and Arabs are marching towards peace. After a long internal debate, Israel has chosen to support the two-State solution.

Furthermore, I must say that in Beirut, the Arab League replaced the three "nays" of Khartoum — which were no peace, no negotiation, no recognition — with an initiative inaugurated by King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. I call upon the King to further his initiative. It may become an invitation for comprehensive peace — one to transform a battleground into a common ground.

I respectfully invite all leaders to come to discuss peace in Jerusalem — which is holy to all of us — where all of us are praying to the same Lord as offspring of the same Father. Israel shall gladly accept an Arab invitation to designate a venue where a meaningful dialogue may take place at their choice.

We are facing a serious economic crisis in the world. Perhaps it has happened because we are rich and light with funds and poor and heavy with ideas, while we live in an era in which science, not land, is the basis for a successful economy. Science does not stop at borders; it is not disturbed by distances. Wisdom cannot be conquered by armies. Knowledge diminishes discrimination because it operates through goodwill and transcends race, nationality, colour and gender.

The global dangers unite and divide us at the same time. The dangers are clear: degradation of the environment, shortage of water, lack of renewable energy, the spread of terrorism and, alas, increased poverty among millions and millions of people. The divisions of the free world may increase them. Unity may offer alternatives. It would direct global investments to new areas and to demanding challenges such as health, security, education and the environment.

The future is not in the hands of oil or gold. Intellectual assets, new inventions and superior education hold the key to the future of each of us. In our region, border areas could become open economic zones, permitting the free movement of people, commodities and ideas. They could encourage tourism and build high-tech incubators. They could cultivate and advance modern agriculture. Economic zones would provide a million jobs and produce billions of cubic metres of desalinated water for the Arabs, for the Palestinians, for the Jordanians, for Israel — for all of us. We have already started to do this; the initial steps are promising.

The Jewish people are celebrating a New Year. I would like to end with a quote by Rabbi Nachman of Breslav:

> "May it be thy will to remove war and bloodshed from the world and perpetuate the wonders and greatness of peace. All the inhabitants of the world shall recognize and know the truth: that we have not been placed on this earth to wage war and not for hatred or bloodshed."

I will repeat it in Hebrew.

(The speaker repeated the quote in Hebrew)

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the State of Israel for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The President returned to the Chair.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Wen Jiabao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): For China, this has been a special year. We experienced

two major events. One was the devastating earthquake in Wenchuan, which caused grave loss of life and property. In the face of the disaster, the Chinese people showed great strength, courage, solidarity and resilience. By now, the people affected by the earthquake have been properly relocated and recovery and reconstruction work is well under way. The other event was the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games. That grand sporting event provided a good opportunity for athletes from around the world to show true sportsmanship. It also enabled the world to learn more about China and for China to learn more about the world.

In our fight against the earthquake disaster and our efforts to host the Games, we received understanding, support and assistance from the international community. I wish to take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude on behalf of the Chinese Government and people.

Now the whole world wants to know in what direction China is heading, both politically and economically, after the Beijing Olympic Games. Let me tell you in unequivocal terms that China will remain committed to the path of peaceful development, unswervingly pursue reform and opening-up, and continue to adhere to an independent foreign policy of peace. This is in the fundamental interests of the Chinese people and the people of all other countries. It is also in keeping with the trend of the world.

The Olympic Games that just concluded were held in China, the largest developing country in the world. The international community has highly commended the efforts made by the Chinese Government and people for the Games, and their success has greatly inspired the Chinese people and given them even more confidence and strength to achieve modernization of the country.

At the same time, however, we are soberly aware that China is a country with 1.3 billion people. Although its total GDP is one of the highest in the world, it trails behind more than 100 countries in terms of per capita income. Development between urban and rural areas and among different regions in China is unbalanced. The rural areas, particularly in western China, are underdeveloped. Tens of millions of Chinese lack adequate food and clothing.

China is still a developing country, where productivity remains low and further development is constrained by the shortage of resources and energy and by environmental consequences. Our socialist market economic system, democracy and the rule of law need to be further improved, and certain outstanding social issues are yet to be resolved. To achieve China's modernization is a daunting task, and we still have a long way to go. Both the opportunities and challenges that we face are unprecedented. We will seize the opportunities, rise up to challenges, dedicate ourselves to nation-building and focus on development. That is what the Chinese Government and people have been thinking and doing.

People may ask how China is achieving its development. The answer is through reform and opening up. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of China's reform and opening-up policy, a policy that fundamentally changed the closed, backward and ossified situation that had existed in China for years. It is a policy that freed people's minds and aroused their initiative, liberated the productive forces, generated great economic and social progress and instilled vigour and vitality into the country. Without that policy, there would not have been such change in China in the last 30 years.

To achieve the goal of modernization and build a strong, prosperous, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious country, we will pursue the reform and opening-up policy. It is of vital importance to the development of China today. It is also a strategy that will shape China's future. We are firm in carrying this policy forward.

The Chinese nation has all along cherished the fine tradition and benefited from the wisdom of being open to new ideas and drawing on the strengths of others. The Chinese people have learned from 30 years of reform and opening up that only continued economic and political restructuring and reform in other fields can lead to sustained economic growth and social progress. And only continued opening up in an all-round way can lead the country to greater national strength and prosperity. This is the conclusion we have drawn both from our practice and exploration and from historical experiences.

The world needs peace, for only with peace can there be development. China earnestly hopes to have a peaceful international environment in order to achieve its development goals. The Chinese Government is committed to an independent foreign policy of peace

and stands ready to work with other countries to advance the noble cause of the peace and progress of mankind.

Respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries is the prerequisite for sound State-to-State relations. The Chinese people have learned from their modern history of humiliation that when a country loses its sovereignty, its people lose dignity and status. China is firm in upholding its hard-won sovereignty and territorial integrity and will never tolerate any external interference. Following the principle of treating each other as equals, China also respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries, as well as the independent choices of their people for their own social systems and development paths.

China is ready to develop friendly relations with all countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit rather than on ideology or on a political system. In handling international affairs, we make our own judgement on the merit of each case and take our position in light of our national interests and the well-being of the world's people. We will neither blindly follow the position of others nor give way to the pressure of any forces. In international relations, China does not seek to build alliances or become a leader and will never do so in the future.

Peaceful settlement of international disputes is a founding purpose of the United Nations and a basic principle of international law. China is committed to addressing historical issues and current differences with other countries through dialogue and negotiation. As a permanent member of the Security Council, China will continue to play an active and constructive role in promoting the peaceful settlement of international hotspot issues and regional conflicts.

China's development is peaceful in nature. It will not harm anyone or pose a threat to anyone. China does not seek hegemony now, nor will it do so in the future. China keeps and develops an appropriate level of military capability solely for the purpose of safeguarding China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The confidence and pride of the Chinese nation today are based on China's economic development, social justice, the civility of its people and moral strength. China will, through its own development, contribute to the peace and development of the world.

In the long history of humankind, the destinies of countries have never been so closely linked as they are today. Given the global nature of issues threatening the survival and development of mankind, such as global warming, environmental degradation, resource constraints, frequent outbreaks of diseases and natural disasters and the spread of terrorism, and in the face of the intertwining challenges related to finance, energy and food, no country can expect to avoid difficulties or to handle the problems alone.

Ongoing financial volatility, in particular, has affected many countries, and its impact is likely to become more serious. To tackle the challenge, we must all make concerted efforts. So long as people of all countries, including their leaders, can do away with hostility, exclusion and prejudice, treat each other with sincerity and an open mind and forge ahead hand in hand, humankind will overcome all difficulties and embrace a brighter and better future.

China, as a responsible major developing country, is ready to work with other members of the international community to strengthen cooperation, share opportunities, meet challenges and contribute to the harmonious and sustainable development of the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. José Ramón Machado Ventura, First Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the First Vice-President of the Council of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. José Ramón Machado Ventura, First Vice-President of the Council of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. José Ramón Machado Ventura, First Vice-President of the Council

of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Machado Ventura (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, on behalf of Cuba, I would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly.

We are living at a decisive moment in the history of humankind. The threats looming over the world put the very existence of the human species at risk.

The promotion of peace, solidarity, social justice and sustainable development is the only way to ensure the future. The prevailing world order, unjust and unsustainable, must be replaced by a new system that is truly democratic and equitable, based on respect for international law and on the principles of solidarity and justice, putting an end to the inequalities and exclusion to which the great majorities of the population of our planet have been condemned.

There are no alternatives. Those responsible for this state of affairs — the industrialized countries, and in particular the lone super-Power — must shoulder their responsibilities. Fabulous fortunes cannot continue to be wasted while millions of human beings are starving or dying of curable diseases. It is not possible to continue to pollute the air and poison the oceans, which is destroying the living conditions for future generations. Neither the peoples nor the planet itself will permit that without great social upheavals and extremely grave natural disasters.

Wars of conquest, aggression against and the illegal occupation of countries, military intervention and the bombing of innocent civilians, the unbridled arms race, the pillaging and usurpation of the natural resources of the Third World and the imperial offensive to crush the resistance of peoples who are defending their rights constitute the greatest and most serious threats to international peace and security.

Concepts such as the limitation of sovereignty, pre-emptive war and regime change are expressions of the desire to mutilate the independence of our countries. The so-called war on terrorism and the alleged promotion of freedoms serve as pretexts for aggression, military occupation, torture, arbitrary detention, the denial of the right of peoples to self-determination, unjust blockades, unilaterally imposed sanctions and the imposition of political, economic and social models that facilitate imperial domination with flagrant disdain for history, cultures and the sovereign will of peoples.

The gap between the rich and the poor widens daily. The very modest Millennium Development Goals are an unattainable dream for the vast majority. While $1 trillion is spent on weapons worldwide, more than 850 million human beings are starving, 1.1 billion have no access to drinking water, 2.6 billion lack sewage services and more than 800 million are illiterate. More than 640 million children lack adequate housing, 115 million do not attend primary school and 10 million die before reaching the age of 5, in most cases as the result of diseases that can be cured.

With increasing frequency, the populations of the South are suffering from natural disasters, whose consequences have been worsened by climate change. Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba and other countries of the Caribbean are examples. We issue a special call for solidarity with the brotherly people of Haiti in their tragic situation.

The rise in oil prices is the result of irrational consumption, heavy speculative activity and imperial military adventures. The desperate search for new sources of energy has propelled the criminal strategy driven by the Government of the United States to transform grains and cereals into fuel.

For many of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, the situation is becoming unsustainable. Our nations have suffered and will have to continue to suffer the consequences of the irrationality, wastefulness and speculation of a few countries in the industrialized North, which are responsible for the world food crisis. They imposed trade liberalization and financial prescriptions of structural adjustment on the developing countries. They caused the ruin of many small producers; they denied — and in some cases destroyed — nascent agricultural development in the countries of the South, turning them into net importers of food.

It is they who continue scandalous agricultural subsidies while imposing their rules on international trade. They set prices, monopolize technologies, impose unjust certifications and manipulate distribution channels, financing sources and trade. They control transport, scientific research, gene pools and the production of fertilizers and pesticides.

We have not come here to complain. We have come, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, to support and defend the demands of billions of human beings who are calling for justice and respect for their rights. The formula is not difficult; nor does it require great sacrifices. All that is needed is the necessary political will, less selfishness and the objective understanding that, if we do not act today, the consequences could be apocalyptic and would also affect the rich and powerful. That is why Cuba, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, calls once again on the Governments of developed countries to honour their commitments. In particular, we urge them to do the following.

They should put an end to the wars of occupation and to the plundering of the resources of the countries of the Third World, and should free up at least a part of their millions in military spending so that those resources can be allocated to international assistance for the benefit of sustainable development.

We urge them to cancel the foreign debt of developing countries, which has already been paid more than once. That would release additional resources that could be devoted to economic development and social programmes.

They should honour the commitment to allocate at least 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to official development assistance without conditions, so that the countries of the South could use those resources for their national priorities. They should also promote access on the part of poor countries to substantial new financing.

They are urged to devote one fourth of the money that is wasted each year on commercial advertising to food production, which would provide nearly $250 billion more to fight hunger and malnutrition.

They should allocate the money being used for agricultural subsidies in the North to agricultural development in the South. Thus, our countries would have approximately $1 billion per day at their disposal to invest in food production.

We urge them to comply with the commitments set out in the Kyoto Protocol and to establish more ambitious emission-reduction targets beginning in 2012, without seeking to increase restrictions on countries that, even now, maintain far lower per capita emission levels than those of the countries of the North.

They should promote access by Third World countries to technology and should support the training of their human resources. Today, on the other hand, qualified personnel from the South are subjected to unfair competition and incentives resulting from discriminatory and selective migration policies implemented by the United States and Europe.

Something that is today more urgent than ever is the establishment of a democratic and equitable international order and a fair and transparent trading system in which all States can participate, in sovereignty, in the decisions that affect them.

It is our deepest belief that solidarity between peoples and Governments is possible. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and Petrocaribe have demonstrated this.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries has remained faithful to its founding principles. We support the cause of the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to self-determination in an independent and sovereign State, with its capital in East Jerusalem. We support the cause of those other peoples whose sovereignty and territorial integrity is being threatened, like those of Venezuela and Bolivia, and we endorse the right of Puerto Rico to be independent.

We condemn the imposition of unilateral coercive measures in violation of international law and attempts to implant a single model for a political, economic and social system. We object to the negative practice of certifying countries that follows the patterns and interests of the powerful. We strongly oppose political manipulation and the application of double standards in the matter of human rights, and we reject the selective imposition of politically motivated resolutions against the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The establishment of the Human Rights Council offers the opportunity to open a new era in the promotion of and protection for all human rights for all, on the basis of international cooperation and constructive dialogue. Those who caused the demise of the old Human Rights Commission are now trying to disqualify the Council because they have not been able to bend it to serve their own interests. They refuse to participate in its work in order to escape the scrutiny of the international community within the framework of

the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. The legitimacy of the Council does not depend on the perception that the empire has about its work, but on its capacity to discharge its mandate with the strictest adherence to the principles of universality, objectivity, impartiality and non-selectivity in the treatment of human rights issues.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries will continue to defend the interests of the Third World and promote the building of a world which is more just, more democratic and with greater solidarity.

Cuba has had to pay a very high price for the defence of its independence and sovereignty. The heroic Cuban people have endured the longest and cruellest blockade in history, imposed by the most powerful nation on Earth. Despite the fact that this Assembly has repeatedly and resoundingly taken a stand in favour of ending that genocidal policy, the United States Government has not only ignored the will of the international community, but in marked disregard of it has gradually intensified its economic war against Cuba. Never has the foreign policy against a country been armed with such a broad and sophisticated arsenal of aggressive measures in the political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, military, psychological and ideological domains.

Cuba has just been lashed by two intense hurricanes, which have devastated its agriculture, seriously affected part of its infrastructure and damaged or destroyed more than 400,000 homes. Allow me to take advantage of this opportunity, on behalf of the Cuban Government and people, to thank all those countries, organizations and persons who in one way or another have honestly and sincerely contributed with resources or moral support to the reconstruction efforts undertaken by my country. That stands in contrast with the position of the United States Government, which continues to ruthlessly apply the blockade.

Cuba has asked for no gifts from the United States Government. It has simply asked and asked again that it be allowed to purchase in the United States the materials that are indispensable for the reconstruction of homes and the power grid, and that American companies be authorized to grant Cuba private commercial credits to buy food. The answer has been negative and has been accompanied by an attempt to manipulate information in such a manner that the Government of the United States seems to be concerned for the well-being of the Cuban people while the Government of Cuba is perceived as turning down their offer.

If the United States were really so concerned for the Cuban people, the only moral and ethical behaviour would be to lift the blockade imposed on Cuba for five decades, in violation of the most elemental rules of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. That irrational policy has a clear objective: to destroy the process of profound revolutionary transformation undertaken by the Cuban people since 1959 — in other words, to trample on its right to self-determination, wrest away its freedom and its political, economic and social conquests and push it backwards to its former neocolonial status.

The Bush Administration attempts to justify the intensification of its policy against Cuba by turning once more to fraud and deceit, with its characteristic cynicism and hypocrisy. Its determination to dominate and recolonize Cuba is being presented as nothing less than as an endeavour to liberate and democratize.

Who, other than its accomplices, recognizes that the United States Government has any authority in this world in the matter of democracy and human rights? What authority could such a Government claim that hunts down and cruelly mistreats illegal migrants at its southern border, that legalizes the use of torture and keeps in concentration camps — such as the one installed in the territory illegally occupied by the United States base at Guantánamo — people who have not been proved of or even charged with any crime? What respect is due to a Government that attacks the sovereignty of other States, using the excuse of the fight against terrorism, while at the same time guaranteeing impunity to anti-Cuban terrorists? What kind of justice can be promoted by an Administration that illegally keeps imprisoned five Cuban patriots who were only seeking information to neutralize the actions of the terrorist groups operating against Cuba from the United States?

Cuba appreciates the solidarity it has received from the General Assembly in its fight against the blockade and the aggression that it has had to confront for almost five decades. Cuba reaffirms its unyielding decision to defend its sovereignty and independence. Cuba reiterates its will to carry on, together with members of the Non-Aligned Movement, in the battle

for a better world, where the rights of all peoples to justice and development are respected.

To conclude, I would like to recall the words of the Commander-in-Chief of the Cuban Revolution, Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz: "A world without hunger is possible. ... A just world is possible. A new world, which our species eminently deserves, is possible and will become reality."

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the First Vice-President of the Council of State and Ministers of the heroic and supportive Republic of Cuba for the statement he has just made.

Mr. José Ramón Machado Ventura, First Vice-President of the Council of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before adjourning this meeting, I wish to remind members that the opening meeting of the High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals will take place in the General Assembly Hall tomorrow from 8.45 to 10 a.m. Immediately thereafter, at 10 a.m., the general debate will continue.

The meeting rose at 1.55 p.m.